

Advisory Committee
September 30, 2015
Felix Juliani Meeting Room, Town Hall

Frank Pinto called the meeting of the Wellesley Advisory Committee to order at 7:00pm. Those present included Mary Crown, Tom Fitzgibbons, Chad Harris, John Hartnett, Mike Hluchyj, Mark Kaplan, Michael Mastrianni, Alena Poirier, Sara Raveret, Mason Smith, Ria Stolle, Scott Tarbox, and Kathleen Woodward.

Citizen Speak:

No one wished to speak at this time.

Meet with Executive Director to discuss Town Government Study Committee's recommendations:

Hans Larsen shared his views on the TGSC proposals; he was speaking as the Executive Director of Government Services, not as a spokesperson for the Board of Selectmen. Hans is overwhelmingly in favor of the proposal to create a Town Manager position. He sees little systemic operational coordination in the current system—employees and volunteers have to rely on collaboration. He believes the Town should engage “customers” (residents) with an internal structure that works best for the customers. The preoccupation with departmental priorities and activities does not translate into the best value for the residents; currently there is little sponsorship or support for across-the-town functions, such as IT, finance, HR, and telephone systems; the town-wide perspective should be factored into performance appraisals of department heads; all boards and department heads should be involved in each other's peer reviews; and there should be consistency across town with respect to HR functions. Hans supports the creation of a Planning and Land Management Division. The suggested departments for the new division have 15 employees reporting to six different boards, and they are behind-the-curve with technology. Residents have a difficult time negotiating the separate silos. The residents would benefit from operational coordination, cross-training among the administrative staff, integrated database processes, and communication among the boards and departments. In conclusion, Hans believes the TGSC's recommendations establish a platform for raising the performance of our town government to a higher level.

Meet with Library Trustees to discuss TGSC's recommendations:

Beth Sullivan (the Chair), Diane Savage, Marla Robinson, and Ann Howley addressed the Advisory Committee. They do not support the current proposals by the TGSC, which they believe would gut the responsibilities of the Library Trustees with respect to their budget, employment hiring, and adoption of their own policies and plans. They are concerned that under the proposed Town Manager system, the boards would not get to vote on their own budgets. They also pointed out that there is nothing in the proposed bylaw changes that requires the Town Manager to submit a line item budget—the Library budget has to be certified by the state. The current state law that provides the Library Trustees authority over the library would be changed if the Special Act at the Special Town Meeting is approved. The Library Trustees prefer having a direct employment relationship with the library staff; in fact, they stated that 86% of the Massachusetts towns that have elected library boards have the sole management responsibilities over their own staff. They believe that potential Library Directors in a job search would prefer to report to a board, not to a Town Manager, because of the expertise of the board. The Library Trustees are worried about a conflict of interest for their department head to have to carry out the policies of the board while reporting to a Town Manager. They would support being “carved out” of the TGSC's proposals and continuing to operate as they do now. The Library Trustees want to retain responsibility for the hiring, firing, and supervising of their director. They plan to put forward an amendment at the Special Town Meeting, and they have a meeting with Town Counsel on October 19th.

Hardy-Hunnewell-Upham planning update:

Chad Harris summarized the School Facilities Committee's recommended plans for Hardy-Hunnewell-Upham. The plans are to renovate the Hunnewell Elementary School, close the Hardy Elementary School, and build a new Upham Elementary School. The expectation is that that the consolidation would eventually save the town \$500,000 per year.

Advisory Committee discussion of TGSC proposals, legislation, and bylaws:

Members agreed that having the boards come in to share their views on the proposals has been invaluable. Some members agree that the bylaws should require the Town Manager to "consult" with the boards during the hiring and budget processes. A few members thought the Library Trustees raised interesting points—and wondered if it might make sense for them to be "carved out" of the proposals. Several other members think that carving out one board (or more) would defeat the purpose of what the TGSC's proposals are trying to accomplish. Some members agreed with combining departments into a Planning and Land Management Division and believe the "customer experience" for the residents should be valued and improved. One member thought a Town Manager perspective in the hiring process of department heads would be a benefit. Several members agreed with Hans Larsen and his arguments for creating a Town Manager position. Several members had the opinion that a strong Town Manager would most likely not interfere with the missions of the boards and departments—why would he/she when the departments are so well run? One argued that the Town would get stronger candidates for a "Town Manager" position than for an "Executive Director of General Government Services" position. Members debated whether the departments should be considered individual "companies" or whether they should be considered subsidiaries of the whole town.

FY2017 Budget: The budget was not discussed at this time.

Liaison Reports: No reports were presented.

Approval of Minutes:

Mary Crown made a motion to approve the minutes of September 26, 2015. The motion was seconded by Michael Mastrianni, and the minutes were approved unanimously by a show of hands.

Old/New Business:

Mary Crown, John Hartnett, and Ria Stolle agreed to represent the Advisory Committee at the WEF Spelling Bee on Thursday, November 5th. The entire Advisory Committee will contribute towards the entrance fee.

The Advisory Committee's Public Hearing will be on Wednesday, October 7th, at 7:00pm, in the Juliani Room in Town Hall. The next Advisory Meeting will start at 6pm on Wednesday, October 7th, and will resume after the Public Hearing ends.

Frank Pinto adjourned the meeting at with no objections.