

## REPORT OF THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE TO THE 2015 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

At the 2014 Annual Town Meeting under Article 30, the Town Meeting voted to establish the “2014 Town Government Study Committee” (TGSC) to review the structure of our Town government. The Moderator appointed nine members to serve on the TGSC: Katherine Babson, Stanley Brooks, Rose Mary Donahue, Arthur Goldberg, Ann Marie Gross, Richard Page, Linda Perlmutter, Anna Sereiko and Thomas Ulfelder. The majority of us have served on a variety of elected and appointed boards and all of us are either current or former Town Meeting Members.<sup>1</sup>

### THE CHARGE

We were charged with studying and making recommendations on the following:

- The existing structure of town government to determine whether it is best suited to the Town’s current and future needs;
- The role and authority of the Executive Director of General Governmental Services as well as alternative management models;
- The number, composition and role of the various elected and appointed boards and committees;
- The potential consolidation, centralization and other changes to the functions and responsibilities of various Town departments;
- The optimal number of Town Meeting Members;
- The number and scope of Town Meetings, as well as the timing of the Annual Town Meeting and the Town elections; and
- Any other topic related to Town government that the Committee deems appropriate.

### THE PROCESS AND TIMELINE

We have met bi-weekly since June and most meetings have been televised. We have divided our work into phases.

**Phase I** consisted of an **internal** review of our existing Town government structure. We studied our current organizational chart (see Appendix A) that shows our 10 elected boards and 2 elected officials and its 19 appointed boards and committees. We reviewed the past TGSC reports from 1986-86; 1993-94; and 2003-2004. We interviewed all of the Town elected and appointed boards and all department heads, some of whom met with us in our TGSC meetings and others of whom were interviewed by two or three members of our Committee (see Appendix B). We met with Representative Alice Peisch, retired Town Counsel Al Robinson, and Executive Director

<sup>1</sup>We have served as follows: Town Moderator(1); School Committee(1); Board of Selectmen (1); Board of Health (1); Planning Board (2); Community Preservation Committee (2); Advisory Committee (5); and current/former Town Meeting Members (all).

of General Government Services Hans Larsen and we had interview sessions with current and former Selectmen, former Advisory Committee chairs, current and former Moderators, Town Meeting Members and Town residents. We met in separate sessions with lawyers, residential builders, and commercial developers and commercial property owners who interact with our land use departments. We reported on all of these interviews and sessions at our meetings. We surveyed all Town Meeting Members from 2009 to the present who resigned or chose not to run for Town Meeting again.

We will present our findings in more detail in a report to a Special Town Meeting this fall. However, it is clear from these sessions and interviews that the Town prides itself on the culture of volunteerism and active citizen participation in Town government, which we believe to be essential components of our Town government. Certain recurring themes also evolved from these conversation, which include:

- Need for centralized planning and setting town-wide priorities ;
- Need to develop and institute an integrated, collaborative budget-building process among Town departments;
- Need to address the “Balkanized” or silo structure across Town boards and departments;
- Need to put in place a structure that ensures consistency in departmental staffing models, in particular in hiring, performance assessment and staff development;
- Need for improved communications and discussion across Town departments and boards and with Town residents; and
- Need to improve boundary between a board’s role in setting policy and staff’s role in managing day-to-day operations.

We completed **Phase I** in December.

**Phase II** consisted of an **external** review of government structures in other Towns. We met in groups of two and three with the Town Managers/Town Administrators of towns which we believe are our “benchmark” communities: Acton, Andover, Belmont, Concord, Lexington, Natick, Needham, Reading, Sudbury, Wayland, Weston, Westwood, and Winchester. We also met with the Town Administrators of Dover and Marshfield. The Town Manager from Needham and the “dean” of Town government structures, Marilyn Contreas, of the Mass. Department of Housing and Community Development also met with our committee. These interviews have helped us understand the variety of approaches municipalities have taken to shape their structures to meet the needs of their particular communities.

To assist us in our work we hired Peter Hechenbleikner as a consultant. He is the recently retired Town Manager of Reading, a position he held for over 26 years. Pete has just completed an assignment in Westwood where he formed the Community and Economic Development department consisting of all entities involved in

land use matters and where he served as Interim Director while a job search was underway. Pete also served for many years as chair of the “Form of Government” Committee of the Massachusetts Municipal Management Association where he worked with the Town Managers/Administrators of many communities and where he developed a keen understanding of differences in the responsibilities and authorities provided these positions among municipalities.

**Phase II** was concluded in February.

During **Phase III**, our current stage, we will develop preliminary recommendations and meet with boards and staff to discuss them. As part of **Phase III**, we intend to survey all Town Meeting Members immediately following the conclusion of the Annual Town Meeting.

In February we held a meeting of all boards and department heads involved in land use decisions. Just under 40 individuals attended from the Building Department, Design Review Board, Natural Resources Commission, Planning Board, Wetlands Protection Committee, and the Zoning Board of Appeals. Representatives attended from the Wellesley Housing Development Corporation, Historical Commission, Historic District Committee, the Denton Road Neighborhood Conservation District and the Board of Selectmen. We discussed the findings of our interviews with these departments and boards and presented some preliminary recommendations regarding land use functions in our Town that included:

- The creation of a Land Use Division under a Director encompassing the land use permitting boards and departments to enable a consistent high quality of customer service, flexibility and efficiencies in staffing and improvement in communications among boards, staff and the public;
- The establishment of the new position of Code Enforcer Officer specifically charged with enforcement of certain aspects of the zoning bylaws and regulations;
- The creation of committee to review and recodify the Zoning bylaws and relevant regulations;
- Expansion of the scope of the Comprehensive Planning process to encompass a strategic plan for the Town; and
- Improvement in office layout in the basement of Town Hall to include the creation of a “single point of contact” for individuals seeking land use permits.

In **Phase IV**, which we anticipate will begin in mid-May, we will roll out recommendations to be made at a Special Town Meeting next fall. These recommendations will be presented in draft form to the boards, staff and community in an extensive series of meetings. We will gather feedback, reflect on what we have heard and continue to work on recommendations over the summer.

**Phase V** will be the development of final recommendations which we expect to roll out in September. We anticipate putting a full package of recommendations before a Special Town Meeting this fall. Because we have heard from Town Meeting Members that they prefer to know as far ahead as possible of the date for a Special

Town Meeting, we have asked the Board of Selectmen to publicize the date of the Fall 2015 Town Meeting as soon as practicable.

**Warrant Article 25** is seeking to extend the life of the TGSC until 2016 ATM; to expand our charge to include a modest clean up of the Town Bylaws; and an appropriation of \$32,000 for further consultant assistance (\$10,000), legal assistance (\$17,000) and miscellaneous (\$5,000).

We encourage input from all of you. We can be reached at [TGSC@wellesleyma.gov](mailto:TGSC@wellesleyma.gov).

Respectfully Submitted,

Katherine Babson, Chair

Ann Marie Gross, Secretary

Stanley Brooks

Richard Page

Rose Mary Donahue, Vice Chair

Linda Perlmutter

Arthur Goldberg

Anna Sereiko

Thomas Ulfelder