

## TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE

October 1, 2014

TOWN HALL - GREAT HALL

Committee: Donahue, Gross, Sereiko, Ulfelder, Brooks, Goldberg, Perlmutter, Babson, Page

Invited speakers: Jim Stokes, Heather Sawitsky, Peg Metzger

The session began with attendance at the Town wide Financial Presentation, held by Hans Larsen, Executive Director, in the Wakelin Room of the Wellesley Free Library. The session ran from 7:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

Chair Gig Babson called the meeting to order at 9:00 PM. She announced that meeting was being taped by the Wellesley Channel for broadcast and web streaming.

There were no citizens present to address the committee.

Babson introduced former Moderators Jim Stokes (1992-96) and Heather Sawitsky (2002-2008) and current Moderator Peg Metzger. It was noted that Gig Babson also served as Moderator from 1984-1991. She asked that discussions focus on the following topics:

Size and start date of Town Meeting

Date of town elections

Creating a standard date for Fall Town Meeting

Article 8 of the annual warrant – Omnibus budget

Reorganizing Advisory Committee into Finance and another subcommittee

### Size of TM

Stokes commented the current size of 240 members works well, members are engaged in the process and take responsibility for representing neighbors and special interest groups. He doesn't believe an open TM would work in Wellesley, a smaller number might invite cliques, and a larger number might reduce attendance.

Sawitsky noted during her tenure the average attendance for budgetary matters was 220, therefore she didn't believe 240 was an issue. She expressed concern that smaller number might reduce representation and range of views.

Metzger concurred that 240 was within an acceptable range of representation, concerned if size was smaller would lose views and ideas of lower vote getters. She commented that more work

should be done to inform public of town government process and encourage residents to run for TM. Both Metzger and Sawitsky have presented, with the Board of Selectmen and School Committee, educational talks to town constituencies such as schools, Council on Aging.

Further discussion ensued on the need for diversity in TMM, the need to encourage residents to run, and finding out why TMMs don't run for re-election. Babson commented on survey to be sent to lapsed TMMs.

#### Article 8 and TM process

Ulfelder asked for insight as to why TM runs over so many nights, and if there were suggested changes to the process.

Metzger asked if there was a way to make Article 8 more meaningful and suggested speaking with communities similar to ours such as Lexington and Brookline.

Metzger also offered the following suggestions for improvement:

- Set time limits for speakers of 2-3 minutes

- Set time limits on presentations

- Amend meeting rules to allow for motions to call for the vote.

Discussion ensued on the benefits of robust debate vs. time limits.

Sawitsky commented that by Town Meeting, Article 8 has been built and vetted and to undo (amend) it on the floor is a daunting task. She suggested opening fall/winter interboard meetings to TMM while the budget was still in formative stages. On the topic of board presentations, she finds them necessary and educational. Both Sawitsky and Metzger have provided assistance to town boards in developing presentations that are informative but succinct.

Sawitsky stated it was important not to impede useful discussion at TM, however the ability to cut off speakers after a reasonable amount of time would assist in easing frustration among TMMs. The Moderator needs support in this regard through a change to the rules of conduct for TMMs. She also supported 3 minute time limits for speakers.

Discussion continued regarding ways to make TM presentations useful and succinct.

#### Timing of TM and town elections

Sawitsky, Metzger and Stokes discussed various points concerning the timing of TM:

- Many communities have a later TM start date to ensure they have adequate information from the state

The timing of override and debt exclusion votes is dependent on TM timing

School vacation dates and spring activities come into play when TM continues into April

Regarding town elections, Sawitsky and Metzger supported the idea of keeping date as first Tuesday in March but delaying the start date for newly elected board members to July 1 with a June orientation.

Discussions continued regarding the committee appointments made by the Moderator. Making appointments is the most time consuming task for Moderator. Special care is taken with appointing members to Advisory Committee as this service provides training for future town leaders.

#### Fall Town Meeting

The topic was raised of a standard fall TM to deal with non budgetary articles such as zoning bylaws. Stokes considers fall TM a good introduction for new TMMs. Sawitsky expressed concern over the workload assumed by Advisory for a fall TM and stated that those towns with a fall TM also had a long standing Finance Committee. Donahue commented that complex zoning issues would be better presented and received in the fall as opposed to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> night of spring TM. Metzger expressed concern that regular fall TM might grow from single issue meetings to broad meetings covering 2-3 nights. Metzger suggested setting standard dates for fall TM to set expectations, the dates could go unused if not needed.

Perlmutter asked if TMMs leaving after break presents a problem and Metzger stated it is an issue as some TMMs cannot stay until 11:00 p.m. She suggested an earlier TM start time. Babson stated that a TM questionnaire would be sent after the fall TM.

Babson thanked the three Moderators for their comments and views.

Babson requested that all subcommittee interviews be completed and documented by mid-November.

Calendar:

November 12 (9:30 – 11:00 a.m.) & November 13 (7:30 – 9:00 p.m.): meetings with TMMs

Minutes – September 17 minutes accepted.

Adjourned 11:00 p.m.

Submitted By Anna Sereiko