

Town Government Study Committee 2014

Library – Great Hall

December 3, 2014 7:30 pm

Committee: Katherine L Babson Jr., Rose Mary Donahue, Arthur J Goldberg, Ann Marie Gross, Richard Page, Linda Perlmutter, Anna Sereiko, Thomas Ulfelder, Stanley Brooks,

Also: Kathleen Nagle

Guests: Alice Peisch

Katherine Babson called meeting to order at 7:30 pm. There were no citizens to speak to the committee.

Babson welcomed guest State Rep Alice Peisch (former Town Clerk, School Committee, Advisory Committee, Town Meeting Member).

Peisch addressed the committee with her perspectives on the structures of various town government organizations. She reflected that the structure of the government does not necessarily guarantee the outcomes. There are strengths and limitations for decentralized structures. As government becomes more complex there are challenges for governance. As governance moves toward centralization of authority there are opportunities for making decisions more efficiently.

Peisch is familiar with the Weston governance structures. They made changes to Town Manager in 2000 and retained some elected boards. Town Manager has general authority over hiring and some positions are still appointed by the BOS (Fire, Police, Town Clerk).

On the issue of an elected or appointed town clerk: Towns strike a balance for this position, it is important to have a person with appropriate background and qualifications, but also someone who knows the community and is responsive. Town Clerk position is governed by many state statutes and must follow those regulations in the conduct of the position. She suggested that a legal background is helpful in the position as comfort with understanding statutes and regulations are a daily part of the job.

Peisch commented that a value of Wellesley Government is the ability of the citizen to find a person who is responsive to their inquiry. The interest of the elected officials in hearing the views of residents and being responsive is a quality that is valued here.

Peisch explained the process for obtaining special legislation if needed. The item must be approved by a town meeting and then be submitted to the legislature. Then it is reviewed by a committee and reported out to the whole body. The process is likely to take several months, although some items can be expedited. Babson noted some actions may also require voter approval.

An optimal time line might be to hold a STM in Fall with special legislation filed in January and possible legislative action taken to allow voter approval at the annual town election in March.

The Committee should consult with the State Reps office to determine if particular language might be more acceptable to legislature.

Ms. Peisch did not have any strong views on changes to Advisory Committee terms or responsibilities.

She did stress the role of tradition/familiarity with governance structures and the advisability of striking a balance between recommended changes and what is familiar.

Ms Babson expressed the thanks of the committee for Ms. Peisch time and views.

The Committee then heard additional reports on department interviews:

Ulfelder – Building Department

Michael Grant, Building Inspector – noted several issues with his department

Enforcement of certain bylaws – Tree Bylaw and Large House review are problematic

Space for his staff is inadequate- physical working conditions of air quality are a problem

Zoning enforcement is his authority, but not always in concert with Planning and ZBA- crossing of boundaries can interfere with enforcement

Ulfelder – Zoning Board of Appeals

Lenore Mahoney – executive secretary

She is single staff member for department, no backup currently

The current regulations have added to the number of cases filed

Suggests it would be useful to have someone available for explain permitting process to applicants.

Cross training of land use staff would be beneficial

Discussion of the benefits of Recodification of the Zoning Bylaw. Planning needs the time and resources to engage in Recodification. Complex undertaking to recodify. Hard to recodify when making substantive changes.

Babson distributed a questionnaire for committee to use in interviews with peer community town managers/administrators.

Committee to visit 14 towns to interview and understand other governance structures.

Next Meetings:

December 6 at Library with Julian Lange as guest. Look at common themes discovered to date.

December 9 Juliani Room – Marilyn Contreas - guest – discuss alternate forms of governance

The Meeting ended at 9:45 pm.

Submitted by Kathy Nagle