

Town Government Study Committee 2014

Town Hall Great Hall

September 3, 2014

DRAFT with searle/sereiko edits

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

Also: Kathleen Nagle, Don McCauley, Harriet Warshaw, Ellen Gibbs, Barbara Searle, Terri Tsagaris, Tony Parker, Owen Dugan, Larry Shind

Chair Babson called meeting to order at 7:30 pm. She announced that the meeting was being televised by Wellesley cable. She asked the committee members to do short introductions.

Babson welcomed invited guests, current and former members of the Board of Selectmen. She asked the BOS to engage in a broad discussion of governance activities that might overlap with other boards or require interboard cooperation.

Barbara Searle opened with the topic of Traffic, Parking and PSI reviews. Currently the PSI requires BOS traffic review and comment, but the Planning Board can dismiss the BOS comment and interpose their own views.

Don McCauley joined this discussion stating that the whole process of permitting could be reviewed. The role of the Planning Board in its planning function vs its permitting function should be clarified. He suggested that the Traffic review by BOS should be given more weight rather than current system that is advisory only.

Rosemary Donahue (Committee member and former Planning Board) joined to give some history of PSI. The original plan was to give the town leverage to protect town infrastructure when large development is

proposed, and to provide opportunity to mitigate infrastructure costs. Terri Tsagaris joined to say that new regulations for PSI indicate the Planning Board can request the town -hire outside consultants to respond to requirements. This makes projects more expensive. The intent was to use in house expertise of engineering and others in house to conduct the municipal systems evaluations for town sponsored projects.

McCauley stated overtime as PSI has been applied to town projects it has become politicized as a means to comment on the merits of projects. It would be useful to look again at the scope and purpose of PSI.

Harriet Warshaw introduced a new topic for consideration. She spoke to the need for the town to engage in strategic thinking about the operation of town departments as “silos”. If the town continues to operate in “Silos” there is no one entity to bring departments together to collaborate on projects that cross departmental authority. She also stated that there should be a consideration of the system of supervision and evaluation of department heads and the capacity of elected/appointed boards to do supervision. Former Ex Dir Wakelin acquired personal authority beyond the job description to pull departments together as needed, particularly using the power of fiscal control to gain cooperation.

Tony Parker suggested that the current structure does not encourage boards to look at town as a whole, but to look at their own departmental interests. He stated that more training for Boards in the goals of the town might be helpful.

Tsagaris agree that the departments are not always aware of activities/goals of other departments and suggested the need to express a town wide view of objectives.

Searle stated that the business of the town is increasing in complexity and it may be time to rely more on the professional expertise of staff and take some burden off the volunteer board members.

She gave the example of PBC and board members attending meetings. Board reps may not be equipped to comment on technical details that

come up in meetings and perhaps would be more effective to have professional staff with appropriate expertise attending.

Parker raised again the issue of supervision of senior staff by Boards.

Warshaw asked if anyone sits down with Departments heads to discuss goals of the department as part of supervision.

Warshaw suggested the idea of clustering of departments that have commonality. She suggested looking at organization from the point of view of the resident and organize around the range of issues to be solved.

Larry Shind stated that the issues raised by this group suggest a careful look at Town Manager model of governance.

Babson pointed out the model of TDRT that has been used to bring departments together for development projects. This model relied on cooperation of boards to engage in the process and has been successful in multiple project settings.

Searle stated that Wellesley has created informal groups to “work around” the dispersed authority of governance. She suggested that the TGSC look at institutional changes that would mandate similar cooperation.

Owen Dugan stated that communication among departments can work to solve many issues. He suggested the importance of interboard meetings to inform all boards as to issues. He also suggested the use of department head meetings to keep senior staff informed.

Parker/Babson/Tsagaris – suggested looking at Board training to assist board in understanding their roles and responsibilities.

Goldberg asked if centralization of authority would have an impact on Boards.

Dugan thought that taking away authority from Boards would be negative and counterproductive to citizen engagement that we rely on now.

Warshaw hoped to find a Wellesley solution that respected the role and influence of boards but centralized more authority in a manager to oversee supervision, evaluation and interdepartmental cooperation.

Gross asked about the experience of residents in seeking answers/services.

McCauley replied that many citizens come to BOS for issues, but that the actual solution is controlled by other departments. BOS has limited authority to make other departments do something.

Babson raised the issue of budget and finance. The BOS is charged with creation of long range financial plan, but other departments are not required to adhere to the plan.

Gibbs replied that budget planning and long range planning require a great deal of cooperation among the boards. It is risky for departments to put too much out for consideration.

Searle replied that there is tension between Schools and Gen Govt on budget objectives. Other communities may have process that helps solve this issue.

Searle and Tsagaris stated that it is difficult to plan budget without some of the information needed. Some information comes from the state at a very late date.

Shind suggested splitting Advisory Committee into policy and budget groups to help them deal with issues and reduce workload.

Sereiko suggested the idea of a strategic plan that is town wide and includes the goal of all departments including schools. This could inform our choices.

Warshaw agreed that the idea of town wide strategic thinking was valuable.

Page stated that the 2004 TGSC suggested strategic planning but TMM substituted the Financial plan we now have. It does not deal with the goals of the town.

Gross stated that a strategic plan is an ongoing process that would need to be revisited often.

Babson asked the BOS to comment on the timing of ATM/Elections.

Searle replied that in years with override votes the timing has to be early to allow for an election to confirm a balanced budget.

Dugan/Shind suggested changing the date of the election of boards to after ATM

McCauley stated that a later ATM allows town to have more information on finance available. He suggested having a fall ATM for non budget issues.

Babson thanked the BOS members for their time and comments. BOS members left the meeting.

Babson asked if any interview reports were ready for presentation. None were ready.

Babson asked members for additions to the ideas list: (unvetted as to positive/negative)

- High level financial analyst town wide
- Give more power to Finance Committee to make decisions
- Engage in town wide strategic planning process
- Move Election to after ATM
- Provide training to Boards (roles and responsibilities, supervision of staff, orientation for new members)
- Review PSI permitting process
- Develop metrics to judge town services
- Establish periodic department head meetings
- Look at new revenue sources- development

- Require elected board members to be TMM
- Cluster human services departments
- Use of professional staff to reduce reliance on elected boards

Babson announced that former Advisory Chairs were invited to two meeting times, Oct 8 and 9 at library. She encouraged committee to attend one or both sessions.

The minutes of August were approved.

Next Meeting September 17.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

List of documents:

Committee assignment chart updated

Bucket list.