

Advisory Committee
April 30, 2014
Felix Juliani Meeting Room, Town Hall

Marjorie Freiman called the meeting of the Wellesley Advisory Committee to order at 7:45 p.m. Those present included Robert Capozzi, Thomas Engels, Becky Epstein, Tom Frisardi, Ann Marie Gross, John Hartnett, John Hussey, Andy Patten, Ann Rappaport, Deb Robi, and Scott Tarbox.

Citizen Speak

No one wished to speak at this time.

Debrief of Special and Annual Town Meetings

A. Receipt of initial information for Warrant Articles

The Chair asked Liaisons for feedback on their efforts to gather information and draft Warrant Articles for the meetings. Generally, members were satisfied with their interaction with their respective boards and committees. Most questions were answered well and information requested was given in a timely manner. Watching BOS meetings helped liaisons get further information. Last minute Articles were more difficult but everyone was approachable and helpful. For a couple of Articles, information was hard to pin down or hampered by unsettled/or late-settled contracts. It was noted that there were many No-Motion Articles because they were incomplete and not ready to be presented to Town Meeting. The preparation of Gap Lists varied with the school gap list being the only one completed on time. Transparency is critical; it should not just apply to the school budget but should apply to all budgets. There is a need to get Sources and Uses figures more frequently along with other similar financial information as it changes throughout the year. Advisory members feel that all departments need to think strategically, be as cost effective as possible, and strive for further efficiency. Advisory would like more opportunity to investigate accounting books and budgets and to have the Audit Committee present their findings to them on an annual basis.

B. Report-writing Schedule

Our Report Editor, Ann Rappaport, thanked members for their efforts to submit their Article drafts on time. She mentioned the importance of receiving article write-ups earlier than one week before the edit deadline. Some members found it difficult to always understand where we were in the report writing process. The writing and re-writing iteration process was not always consistent across all Articles. The school liaisons noted that the School Administration prepares the School budget. The School Committee made changes to it. The Advisory members working on the school budget had to redo many numbers because the two entities did not do things the same way which was less helpful and created extra work. The earlier timetable this year was considered helpful and allowed further discussion. Drafting the Article write-up generates good questions and helps shape discussion. A suggestion was made to start discussing Articles now – especially those that did not move forward – and develop a work plan for next year. Concern was expressed about the transitioning of some large and active projects to new members for next year. Returning members are encouraged to meet face to face with new members to share experience and facilitate transition.

C. Town Meeting

Many union contracts were settled late and required “last minute” votes and deliberation. Members appreciated the Executive Director’s efforts to present contract settlement information as quickly as possible. Advisory discussed the importance of Town Meeting Members reading the Advisory book in advance of Town Meeting and appreciates the Moderator’s assumption that this would be done. Pre-reading and preparedness by Town Meeting Members helped minimize repetition during presentations and discussions on Articles at Town Meeting. Some excellent questions were raised. Many board referenced the Advisory book and crisper presentations were made. It was noted that warrant Articles are complex and sometimes difficult to digest without the Advisory Committee recommendations. It was noted that Dr. Lussier’s presentation of the school budget as well as Chief Cunningham’s input were very helpful in answering questions.

D. Advisory Book

Overall, very positive feedback was received. There is a lot of information presented and there may be fewer questions asked because people feel that their questions are well answered by the discussions in the book. One member noted that it is fairly long and may dissuade people from reading it entirely. A suggestion was made to place the Town Wide Financial Plan in the front of the book. Members discussed the expenses incurred in the report’s production (printing, materials and mailing) and the possibility of providing binders only to new TMMs. A lengthy discussion about how much information should be included in the Advisory Report, surveying current TMMs to determine how much information they would like to receive and in what form(s) this information should be presented was held.

E. Town Government Study Committee

The Chair read the charge of this newly-formed committee to study our existing town government structure. The Town of Wellesley is a decentralized system of government led by an elected five-member Board of Selectmen and Executive Director of General Government Services. Members shared observations of overlap in roles across town boards and departments and discussed coupling functions to improve efficiencies (i.e. Purchasing, IT, HR)

One member expressed surprise that the Town goes through the same scrutiny for town projects that an outside developer does and this review structure can sometimes create contentious situations between town boards. A suggestion to review these steps and look at how opportunities there are to derail a project was made.

Discussion about increasing density in the Wellesley Square area like Needham and Brookline was held. Also considered was whether or not the town was ready for a town manager-type structure or if our decentralization is our strength with many talented dedicated people involved. It was noted that we do have a body which could force a budget. If the Board of Selectmen refused to support an override, then this decision would force budget discipline to present a balanced budget. Results and outcomes are more a result of who is taking on these roles. In response, a question about what volunteerism will look like in a decade or so was asked. Will

we be able to fill Town Boards and Town Meeting with adequate and effective members? Can we sustain our large number of volunteer positions?

A discussion about the lack of metrics to analyze our productivity and efficiency and suggestions on gathering information through continuing education, hiring consultants, trade groups, peer communities and best practices was held.

Some members feel that the biggest weakness is the guideline setting process. Guidelines are not taken seriously. We need to have a conversation before the guidelines are set. Goals should be set now and work plans developed for next year. At the beginning of the budget cycle, a unified front to all departments should be made. Level service budgets should be presented in conjunction with the same budgets requesting additional monies for better comparison. Building a budget with a gap list as part of the process was also recommended.

Approval of Minutes

Marjorie Freiman made a motion to approve the minutes of April 7, 2014. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously by a show of hands.

Marjorie Freiman made a motion to approve the minutes of April 8, 2014. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously by a show of hands.

Marjorie Freiman made a motion to approve the minutes of April 16, 2014. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously by a show of hands.

Liaison Reports

The Chair asked for liaison reports and various members of the Advisory Committee provided their reports.

New Business/Old Business

Wellesley College is considering selling their property known as “the North 40,” land which abuts Weston and Turner Roads. This property connects to town-owned land at Morses Pond. College representatives will hold an informational meeting to discuss this sale on May 6th at 7:30 p.m. at the Wellesley College Club. All are welcome to attend. The Board of Selectmen is in conversation with Wellesley College officials and has met in Executive Session to discuss the interest in, and possibility of, acquiring the land.

Regarding the upcoming override vote on May 20th, Advisory members cannot take any position or make any recommendation in a form that uses town funds (*i.e.*, no Town-funded mailings).

Wellesley Volunteer Service Day is this Sunday. There will be a car wash at Friendly Aid Building to support camp scholarship fund. Advisory’s end-of-year potluck will be held on June 18th at the home of Chair Marjorie Freiman.

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will be in two weeks on May 14th in the Juliani Room of Town Hall. Advisory will also convene on May 28th, at which time we will conduct an “Advisory Year in Review”. The final meeting of the year will be on June 11th in the Juliani Room of Town Hall. This will be a joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Freiman adjourned the meeting at 10:00 p.m. with no objections.