

Date: July 6, 2015

To: Heidi Gross, Stephen Murphy, Joan Gaughan, Raina McManus

From: Lise Olney

Re: Draft recommendations for the formation of an Environmental Affairs Division

cc: Jack Morgan, Ellen Korpi, Katy Gibson

Proposed Recommendations:

- Create an Environmental Affairs Division focused on conservation, recreation, environmental stewardship, and environmental education.
- Enhance the integration of conservation and environmental issues into the strategic planning and decision-making process of the town.
- Include environmental stewardship as an important element in the portfolio of the town's top executive and in his/her professional goals.

Proposed Mission:

The mission of the Environmental Affairs Division would combine elements of the historical missions of the Natural Resources Commission, Wetlands Protection Committee, and Sustainable Energy Committee. Suggested language:

The mission of the Environmental Affairs Division is

- To enhance the quality of life of town residents through the conservation and protection of natural resources and open space, the development of recreational resources, and the promotion of a clean energy future;
- To actively engage and educate all town departments, residents, businesses, and other entities concerning environmental issues that affect the community, including reduction of carbon emissions.

Proposed Structure:

- The Environmental Affairs Division would be comprised of the Natural Resources Commission, the Wetlands Protection Committee, the Trails Committee, and the Sustainable Energy Committee. The boards would continue to function independently under the umbrella of the EA Division, maintaining their current jurisdictions and authority.
- The EA Division would be led by an EA Director and the current position of NRC Director would be abolished. The EA Director would report directly to the top executive for the town (Executive Director/Town Manager/Town Administrator) and the position would be considered "cabinet level," with the EA Director sitting at the table with those directing the other key divisions of the town.
- The EA Division would be staffed by current NRC employees (including the Wetlands Administrator) all of whom would report to the EA Director. The Wetlands Administrator would continue to provide dedicated, full-time support to the Wetlands Protection Committee. The EA Director would support the work of the NRC, WPC, TC, and SEC, as would the Educational Coordinator and the Administrative Assistants.

Rationale:

Improved integration of conservation, recreation, and environmental concerns into the fabric of town government: Wellesley has a long, proud history of appreciation for and protection of the town's natural resources, recreational areas, and open space. The creation of the Natural Resources Commission, the Wetlands Protection Committee, and the Sustainable Energy Committee exemplify the town's commitment to conservation, and to a clean, healthy environment. These boards have achieved many laudable successes. However, environmental concerns have at times remained outside the mainstream of the decision-making process at most levels of town government. In fact, one of the key findings of the Town Government Study Committee is that the current structure of town government creates a "silo" effect, in which decisions are made in relative isolation.

The NRC, WPC, and SEC are all responsible for representing environmental issues and concerns, but none of these entities has regular or sustained contact with many key departments, committees, and decision makers in town government. In her memo of July 2 to the SEC, Katy Gibson asked several questions that are recast here for your consideration regarding the NRC:

- What organizational structure is most likely to result in strengthening the town commitment to environmental concerns and lead to increased action?
- What organizational structure is most likely to allow the NRC to continue to build partnerships and collaborations with other town departments?
- What organizational structure is most likely to put the NRC in the loop regarding strategic goals, proposed projects, and policy changes relevant to our mission?

The creation of the Environmental Affairs Division – with an EA Director who reports directly to the top executive – would aim to establish environmental stewardship as an important consideration in the town's strategic planning and decision-making, along with other deciding factors such as cost, public health, public safety, etc. Reporting directly to the top executive, the EA Director would have the necessary support of the highest level of the town administration. This structure would provide the EA Director with the potency required to be a credible voice in town-wide strategic planning, decision-making, and resource allocation. Holding a "cabinet level" position, the EA Director would be plugged in to town issues at their early stages and better able to serve as a resource as solutions are developed.

Partnering with the SEC under a single umbrella – The NRC, WPC, and SEC are largely responsible in town government for representing issues related to the environmental stewardship. The overlapping interests of the NRC and SEC are demonstrated by their successful collaboration on the 3R (Reduce/Reuse/Recycle) Working Group, along with the Department of Public Works. These overlapping interests are best served through coordination and joint effort. By combining all environmental affairs in one division, the synergy between the NRC and SEC would be institutionalized as part of the structure of town government, and would improve the integration of the interests of both entities with that of the town.

At the state level, the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs is a good model for the potential cooperative interaction and extraordinary success made possible by administrative consolidation of those who are focused on all aspects of the environment in a cabinet-level division.

More effective educational outreach – Educational outreach is an essential component in the missions of the NRC, WPC, and SEC. A coordinated approach to all public outreach on

environmental issues (through coordinated web pages, digital communications, social media) will improve effectiveness, create more coherent messaging, and increase public awareness. The position of Environmental Education Coordinator would be optimized, supporting the NRC, WPC, and SEC, and providing a single voice for environmental outreach. The Environmental Educational Coordinator could continue to extend the reach of the EA Division to residents, schools, grassroots groups regarding specific initiatives (e.g. pesticide awareness, rain water management, wetlands, food waste, recycling).

Recommendations Regarding Other Town Entities:

There are many mission-critical areas in which the EA Division would coordinate with other town entities. Some of these relationships are described below.

Location of the Wetlands Protection Committee – The WPC is a necessary part of the NRC, but the WPC is also an integral part of the Town permitting process. The Town Government Study Committee has proposed that the WPC (and, therefore, the NRC) become part of a proposed Land Use Division that would coordinate all permitting functions. An alternative solution is to maintain the WPC as part of the NRC (in the EA Division) with a dotted line connecting it to the Land Use Division. Full coordination with the permitting process could be achieved administratively and through the development of permitting software under the Land Use Division.

Relationship to Department of Public Works – The EA Division would have an important coordinated relationship with the DPW on maintenance of park and conservation land, public shade trees, waste management issues (including recycling and food waste), and other related areas. (A continuation of the current and historical collaboration between the NRC and the DPW.)

Relationship to Municipal Light Plant – The EA Division would have an important coordinated relationship with the MLP on energy-related issues. (A continuation of the current and historical collaboration between the SEC and the MLP.)

Relationship to Recreation Commission and Playing Fields Task Force – The EA Division would have an important coordinated relationship with both the Recreation Commission and the Playing Fields Task Force. (A continuation of the current and historical collaboration between the Recreation Commission and Playing Fields Task Force, and the NRC.)

Conclusion:

Historically, the independence of the NRC, WPC, and SEC has had the unintended consequence of sometimes isolating these boards and the environmental concerns they share. The creation of an Environmental Affairs Division consolidates environmental interests, including energy, under the same administrative umbrella, recognizing compatible missions, and elevating shared concerns to the “cabinet level” in town government.