

Town of Natick - Town Governance Study Committee  
Approved meeting minutes  
January 30, 2023 7:00 PM  
Via Zoom

Members present: Carol Gloff (Chair), Matt Brand (Vice Chair), Linda Wollschlager, Lisa Tabenkin, Dan Sullivan, Michael Avitzur, Hillary Truslow, Joshua Ostroff (clerk).  
Ex Officio member: Sue Salamoff.

Also present: Carl Valente, Bernie Lynch and John Petrin, all of Community Paradigm, and Harriet Merkowitz.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Gloff at 7:03 PM with reference to the regulations applicable to virtual public meetings, followed by a roll call.

### **Public Speak**

Linda stated that there was a joint meeting of the FC, SB and SC to discuss the FY24 budget. It will be a hybrid meeting in the School Committee room.

### **Community Paradigm Discussion – Options for Local Government Organizations in Massachusetts**

Carol recapped the last meeting and noted that there was an intention to identify the specific problems we wanted to help resolve. Matt will share a document in which he will list the issues that people raise; the issues may then be grouped.

Members then shared their thoughts on structural issues, incorporated for reference.

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### Focus Areas by Category

#### Structure

- (Josh) Town Govt structure is too slow/too cumbersome/not responsive/not well-suited to our changing town
- (Josh) Marginal/poor civic participation
- (Josh) Demands too much staff time
- (Sue) Support Town Clerk, Constable being appointed
- (Sue) Planning board term is too long?
- (Sue, Dan) Town Meeting is too large
- (Carol) General Town Meeting structure
- (Dan, Sue) Fall & Spring Town Meeting is too many sessions
- (Dan, Sue) Not appropriate authority for the Town Administrator
- (Dan) Police Chief being “weak” is problematic
- (Dan) Finance Committee is too big
- (Linda, Carol) Do we have too many committees?
- (Hillary) Boards/Committees/TM doesn’t actually feel representative
- (Mike) Perhaps too many checks in place (leading to inefficiency)
- (Mike) What is the best way to perform the legislative function of the town (is our form of town meeting outdated and can it be more additive)?

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Authorities

- (Carol) Select Board
- (Carol) Who appoints
- (Carol) A general sense of who has what authority and can anything be cleaned up
- (Mike, Carol) Ambiguous authority lines and too much overlap

Process

- (Dan) Budget formation. There are essentially 2 separate budgets created currently that need to be reconciled.
- (Dan) Preliminary elections
- (Lisa) Redundancy and duplication of effort with the schools and town in certain areas (Comptroller's office)
- (Linda) Cumbersome to get things done
- (Hillary) Is the SB too much in the weeds and should they be focused on bigger picture strategy
- (Hillary) Efficiency. Efficiency. Efficiency.
- (Hillary) Archaic systems in place contribute to lack of efficiency

Recommendations

- (Sue) Enhance the authority of the Town Administrator
- (Sue) Enhance the Select Board role in policy making
- (Dan) Shrink the size and structure of the Finance Committee

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Lisa joined the meeting at 7:48.

Bernie commented that they would prefer to learn more before suggesting solutions; John echoed this. Carl spoke about the benefits of looking at other communities that have addressed similar challenges to those we face.

Linda spoke to the need to understand how a Council form of government would actually address these issues. The Town's challenges were at a higher level.

Josh shared his perspective that if we needed to make significant change that would require Town Meeting or legislative and Voter approval, that this committee did not have that authority. The sooner we got to a process recommendation, the better in the interest of time. Carol expanded on that and reinforced that we are a study committee. Dan emphasized that we had a specific charge that included a recommendation to the Select Board and that we should stay within that.

Lisa offered her comments on our challenges. Sue offered additional insights into the structure of the existing form of government.

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Bernie had questions about our budget process, specifically about how we have alternative budget recommendations for the Public Schools and General Government, which Dan and Linda both addressed.

There was discussion of preliminary elections, which last occurred in 2008.

To a question about what in Natick we wanted to retain, Sue spoke about citizen participation.

### **Comparable Communities**

Community Paradigm shared a presentation developed at the state level by DESE on comparable communities, and incorporated for reference. They clustered communities based on demographics and other quantitative factors. Our cohort includes cities and towns with various forms of government, most near Boston but they also added Amherst.

There was a lot of discussion on how the list of comps would be used, by identifying the issues that the committee felt were priorities, and then matching those issues to communities where they had been addressed. While it was derived from DESE's methodology, it is not strictly speaking a DESE list. There was additional discussion of the utility of the list. CP will provide additional information about the factors.

### **Community Forum and outreach**

Josh, Lisa and Sue will convene to discuss a forum, which in discussion was suggested we hold in early April before Town Meeting. There was discussion about other outreach, which the forum planning group will discuss.

### **Next Steps**

We will settle on the list of communities that are comparable, and begin to assess how our issues relate to these communities.

Josh asked for CP's recommendation on our committee's process and deliverable.

### **Meeting Minutes**

January 9, 2023 minutes were approved on a motion by Matt, seconded by Lisa and unanimously voted by roll call. Approval of the January 18, 2023 minutes with technical corrections was moved by Linda, seconded by Matt and unanimously voted by roll call.

### **New Business**

We will discuss our next report to the Select Board at a future meeting. Carol will reach out to Donna Donovan to submit a report for the Annual Town Report.

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## Old Business

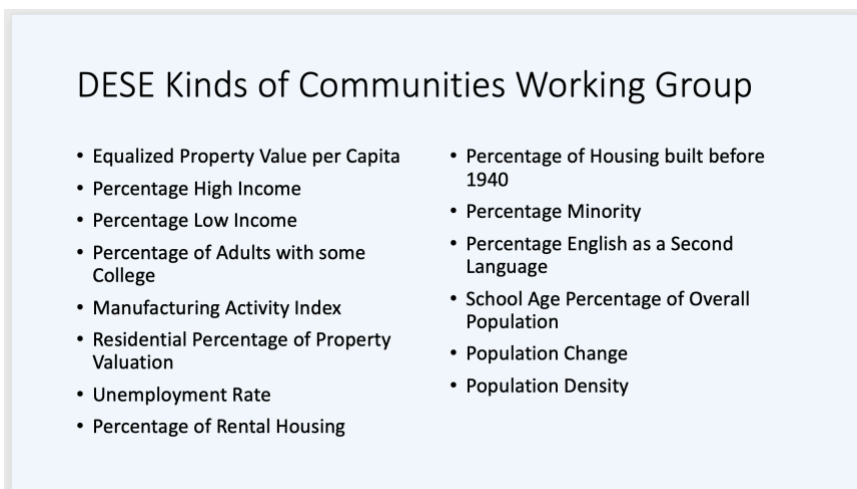
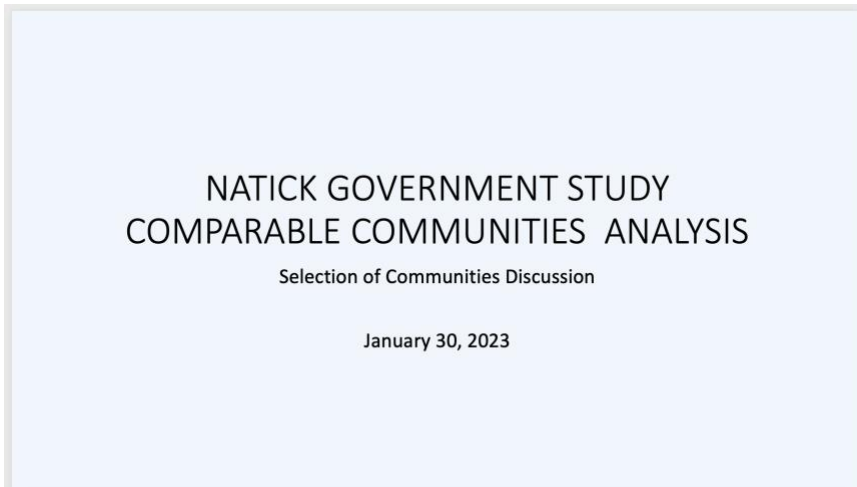
None.

Carol will send a doodle poll for our next meeting.

On a motion by Josh, seconded by Matt, the meeting was adjourned on a unanimous roll call vote at 9:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joshua Ostroff

*Attachment: January 30 presentation from Community Paradigm*



### Economically Developed Suburbs

- |                    |                     |                      |                     |                      |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| • Acton            | • <b>Burlington</b> | • <b>Lexington</b>   | • Randolph          | • Wellesley          |
| • <b>Andover</b>   | • <b>Canton</b>     | • Littleton          | • <b>Reading</b>    | • W. Boylston        |
| • Arlington        | • <b>Chelmsford</b> | • Marblehead         | • Saugus            | • <b>Westborough</b> |
| • Ashland          | • Concord           | • <b>Marlborough</b> | • <b>Shrewsbury</b> | • Westwood           |
| • Auburn           | • <b>Danvers</b>    | • Middleton          | • Somerset          | • Weymouth           |
| • Avon             | • <b>Dedham</b>     | • Milton             | • S. Hadley         | • Wilmington         |
| • Bedford          | • Foxborough        | • <b>Needham</b>     | • Stoneham          | • Winchester         |
| • Belmont          | • Framingham        | • Newton             | • Stoughton         | • <b>Woburn</b>      |
| • Beverly          | • <b>Franklin</b>   | • N. Andover         | • Swampscott        | • East Longmeadow    |
| • Billerica        | • Grafton           | • Northborough       | • Tewksbury         |                      |
| • <b>Braintree</b> | • Holbrook          | • <b>Norwood</b>     | • <b>Wakefield</b>  |                      |
| • Brookline        | • Hudson            | • Peabody            | • <b>Walpole</b>    |                      |

### Further Paring

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| • <b>Andover</b>    | • <b>Marlborough</b> |
| • <b>Braintree</b>  | • <b>Needham*</b>    |
| • <b>Burlington</b> | • <b>Norwood</b>     |
| • <b>Canton</b>     | • <b>Reading</b>     |
| • <b>Chelmsford</b> | • <b>Shrewsbury</b>  |
| • <b>Danvers</b>    | • <b>Wakefield</b>   |
| • <b>Dedham</b>     | • <b>Walpole</b>     |
| • <b>Franklin</b>   | • <b>Westborough</b> |
| • <b>Lexington*</b> | • <b>Woburn</b>      |

### Forms of Government

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Braintree (Mayor)</li> <li>• Franklin (TA)</li> <li>• <i>Amherst (TM)</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• OTM           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andover (TM)</li> <li>• Westborough (TM)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTM           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burlington (TA)</li> <li>• Chelmsford (TM)</li> <li>• Danvers (TM)</li> <li>• Dedham (TM)</li> <li>• <i>Lexington (TM)*</i></li> <li>• <i>Needham (TM)*</i></li> <li>• Reading (TM)</li> <li>• Shrewsbury (TM)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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