

Town of Natick - Town Governance Study Committee
Approved meeting minutes
February 15, 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.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Gloff at 7:07 PM with reference to the regulations applicable to virtual public meetings, followed by a roll call.

Public Speak

None.

Minutes

Minutes for January 30 were approved on a motion by Linda, seconded by Michael and unanimously voted by roll call.

Josh and Carol discussed an issue with the minutes for 1/9. The Clerk had mistakenly posted our January 9 meeting for January 4, consequently it may not have been a legal meeting. We are awaiting guidance. In the meantime, we will likely post an agenda item to ratify any actions taken on January 9.

Summary of Project Status from Community Paradigm

Bernie shared the document sent to the committee (incorporated for reference as Attachment A). He recapped the discussion about forms of government and the impetus to change, the process for change and its scope across municipalities, from wholesale to incremental. There was a recap of the discussion of comparable communities, both in terms of the characteristics and the forms of government.

Bernie then moved to the observations shared by committee members, which they had categorized, and to their observations, also categorized under executive, legislative, management, operations, and other. There was substantial overlap between what the committee members reported and what they as consultants observed.

Then Bernie led to where we go next. They proposed to take this feedback and observations, and break it down into a work plan that would focus on specifics, such as the executive branch. There were specific next steps proposed between now and April.

Proposed Next Steps

1. Review observations (2/15/2023 meeting)
2. Agree to discussion points (2/15/2023 meeting)
3. Consider Overall Governing Principals (2/15/2023)
4. Consider/Discuss discussion points (March/April meetings)
5. Community Forum (April)

Josh asked if this approach has been successful in the past. Bernie said that it was helpful to evaluate the functional areas of government as a process for considering improvements, and elaborated on the advantages of a categorical approach.

Sue concurred.

Dan wondered whether we might identify the low hanging fruit and thought that the Select Board might be looking for that as opposed to the larger issues that would take longer.

Linda sought clarification on aspects of the recommended process to better understand whether each section would present identifiable and discrete choices; Bernie replied that this would be part of the process.

Carol had suggestions about the organization of the topics, and it was noted that these could be amended.

Carl observed that the major structural issues should be a priority, because there was a hierarchy of importance. The low hanging fruit might have value but not be that important in context. He added that it was better to focus on fewer, important issues than many smaller issues which could be put into a "parking lot." The quantity is a concern because important issues can get lost.

Dan agreed with prioritization. Sue concurred and noted that the Board was going to change and had much less experience. Linda mentioned that too, and Josh and Dan made similar points.

There was further discussion about the process and the topics to discuss.

At the next meeting, we will consider appointing authorities.

Guiding Principles

Carl led a discussion on "Community Values for evaluating governance options and recommendations" including ten points that may benefit the committee as we proceed;

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the document is incorporated as Attachment B. There was discussion about various points, with a focus on regional collaboration. The committee explored these principles; members had editorial suggestions and received clarification.

There was consensus to review and potentially adopt a modified and slightly enhanced version of these principles.

Community Forum and outreach

Josh shared the forum outline that he, Lisa and Sue had developed (Attachment C). Members discussed the sequencing and timing, and there was general agreement with this format. We will likely defer the module on committee consensus/division and save that for the report. Josh, Lisa and Sue will meet and bring back a revised proposal.

New Business

Dan referenced the various documents and processes that had been shared relative to other communities comparable efforts, and we may want to take those up at a future meeting.

Carol mentioned the report she had drafted for the Select Board. Matt moved to approve submission, San seconded and it was unanimously voted by roll call.

Meeting Minutes

New Business

Our next meeting will be the week of February 27, with a doodle poll to come, subject to availability of our consultant team.

On a motion by Matt, seconded by Michael, the meeting was adjourned on a unanimous roll call vote at 9:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Joshua Ostroff

Attachments:

A: January 30 presentation from Community Paradigm

B: Community Values for evaluating governance options and recommendations

C: Community Forum proposal

Attachment A: January 30 Community Paradigm presentation

NATICK GOVERNMENT STUDY
COMPARABLE COMMUNITIES ANALYSIS
Selection of Communities Discussion
January 30, 2023

DESE Kinds of Communities Working Group

- Equalized Property Value per Capita
- Percentage High Income
- Percentage Low Income
- Percentage of Adults with some College
- Manufacturing Activity Index
- Residential Percentage of Property Valuation
- Unemployment Rate
- Percentage of Rental Housing
- Percentage of Housing built before 1940
- Percentage Minority
- Percentage English as a Second Language
- School Age Percentage of Overall Population
- Population Change
- Population Density

Economically Developed Suburbs

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

Further Paring

- Andover
- Braintree
- Burlington
- Canton
- Chelmsford
- Danvers
- Dedham
- Franklin
- Lexington*
- Marlborough
- Needham*
- Norwood
- Reading
- Shrewsbury
- Wakefield
- Walpole
- Westborough
- Woburn

Forms of Government

- Council
 - Braintree (Mayor)
 - Franklin (TA)
 - Amherst (TM)
- OTM
 - Andover (TM)
 - Westborough (TM)
- RTM
 - Burlington (TA)
 - Chelmsford (TM)
 - Danvers (TM)
 - Dedham (TM)
 - Lexington (TM)*
 - Needham (TM)*
 - Reading (TM)
 - Shrewsbury (TM)

Attachment B: *Community Values for evaluating governance options and recommendations*

**Town Governance Study Committee (TGSC)
Values and Principles for Evaluating Governance Options and
Recommendations
March 1, 2023**

The TGSC, in looking at options and making recommendations for strengthening Natick's governance structure, did so using the lens of the following values and principles:

1. Promote a citizen-based representative governance structure.

The TGSC believes that community-based organizations, civic associations, community foundations, and grassroots groups provide for effective public engagement and problem-solving efforts that can inform elected and appointed officials in the pursuit of their duties to govern the community. Residents should be fully informed and invited to take part in public affairs. In supporting a citizen-based governance structure, Town officials need to also consider that a large number of formal committees may sometimes lead to an overlap of committee charges and confusion among residents as to the policy direction of the community.

The size of the Town's legislative body and committee structure should be sufficient to support a citizen-based representative governance structure, but not too large to lead to dysfunction in the governance of Town affairs.

2. Provide for accountability through appropriate checks and balances to operations.

The TGSC believes that the chief policy makers are entrusted with the fiduciary responsibility for the Town of Natick and, as such, should provide review and oversight of the budget and financial affairs. Further, the TGSC believes that the governing structure should provide for a clear structure so that the chief executive/administrative officer administers the budget and manages the work programs and spending of all municipal departments within the policy goals of the chief policy makers and appropriations made by the legislative body.

3. Value and encourage institutional knowledge and continuity among policy leaders and Town staff.

The TGSC believes that Natick benefits from having continuity among its policy leaders and Town staff, even while encouraging participation by those residents not previously engaged. The Town's governance structure should be one that values, encourages and promotes institutional knowledge through regular training for elected officials and staff and meaningful and broad-based goal-setting among key officials. Communications among and between boards and committees will provide for more comprehensive policy discussions and satisfaction by committee/board members. Further, Town officials need to be mindful that the number and length of public meetings can discourage individuals' willingness to serve.

Public boards and committees, particularly the chief elected officials, should focus on establishing policies and evaluating programs and services rather than being mired in the day-to-day operations, which should be under the direction of the chief executive/administrative officer and senior staff.

4. Promote an organizational structure that supports effectiveness, efficiency, economy and financial accountability.

The TGSC understands that representative government, in general, and town government specifically is meant to be a methodical, reasoned and consensus building approach to governance. That being said, the TGSC believes that policy makers and administrative leaders should regularly review their policies and procedures with an eye towards improving the effectiveness, efficiency, economy and financial accountability of the Town government. This can be accomplished by establishing a process that, on a regular basis, examines in depth a committee charge/role and a departmental program/services, soliciting feedback from residents, user groups and organizations and advocates of the policy/program.

5. Support regional collaborations for issues that overlap municipal boundaries.

The TGSC believes that policy makers should actively participate in policy matters that cross municipal boundaries (e.g., transportation, water resources). Senior administrative staff should regularly look for opportunities where regional cooperation can lead to improved programs and services for residents.

6. Continue and promote a non-partisan governing structure.

Massachusetts General Laws provide for non-partisan municipal elections. That being said, the TGSC supports a governance structure that values problem solving and collaboration among policy makers over partisan platforms and positions. Further, TSGC advocates for a strong centralized policy making body for the Town that will allow residents to clearly identify accountability for Town affairs.

7. Promote civic engagement, participation and partnering with residents.

The TGSC believes that civic engagement and participation is a key to a citizen-based governance structure. That being said, citizen engagement and participation does not happen on its own. It requires a thoughtful, concerted and coordinated effort to reach and engage residents, particularly ones who have not otherwise been involved in Town affairs or marginalized from Town affairs. For example, outreach to school-based organizations (PTO/PTA), DEI groups and organizations, and the creation of citizen academy type training programs can encourage participation of residents who have not previously been engaged.

8. Promote a governing structure that encourages diversity, social equity, environmental justice and inclusion for all community members.

The TGSC supports a governance structure that provides for the development of principles of equitable engagement to ensure that all persons and groups have meaningful and comprehensive opportunities to be involved. The Town should strive to have the executive and legislative bodies reflect the diversity of the community.

9. Foster a governance structure that provides for integrity in all actions.

The TGSC believes that integrity, transparency and ethical behavior are key factors in having broad-based community support for elected and appointed officials and municipal programs and services. As such, the TGSC recommends that the governance structure be one that encourages the highest ethical ideals through written and enforced policies and procedures.

10. Foster a governance structure that has merit-based principles in all staffing decisions.

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The TGSC believes that the authority to appoint, suspend or remove all Town employees and appointive administrative officers should reside with the chief executive/administrative officer under personnel rules adopted pursuant to the Town charter. The chief executive/administrative officer may authorize any administrative officer (i.e., department head) subject to the chief executive/administrative officer's direction and supervision, to exercise these powers with respect to subordinates in that officer's department, office or agency;

Note: These principles and accompanying notes are largely based on the research and recommendations of the National Civic League in the development of the Model City Charter and the reflect many of the comments and results of the community survey undertaken by the TGSC.

Attachment C: *Community Forum Proposal*

Town Governance Study Committee - Public Forum Proposal **Local Governance 101 - Choices for Natick**

Goals

1. Inform the public about the committee's charge and work, primarily through resources available to the public in advance of the meeting that are summarized at the event.
2. Target the broader public beyond the stakeholders whom we have already interviewed and surveyed
3. Provide an overview of the range of options available for local government structure
4. Share a high-level summary of the issues that the committee has identified through its work (problems/possible solutions)
5. Accept structured public comment, with limited public participation at the forum and also through online/written input before and after; comments may be provided as individuals, or on behalf of boards and committees
6. Incorporate the learning from this event/process into the final committee report
7. Offer the Charter and Bylaw Review Committee an opportunity to address the public and invite engagement

Logistics

Online on Tuesday, April 11 via Zoom

Run of Show

- Welcome and acknowledgements (5) (tbd)
- Module 1: overview of TGSC activities (5) (tbd)
- Module 2: Forms of Government in MA (15) (Community Paradigm)
 - The 4 flavors of local govt
 - Open Town Meeting
 - Representative Town Meeting
 - Council/Manager
 - Council/Mayor
 - The 3 ways to change our charter
 - Town Meeting > Voters
 - Voters > Charter Commission > Voters
 - Select Board > Charter Committee > Town Meeting > Legislature > Voters
- Module 3: What people like and don't like about our government structure (10) (tbd)
- Module 4: Committee areas of consensus and division (5) (tbd)

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- Module 5: structured comment/input with time limits (~20) (moderator tbd)
 - Module 6: CBRC commercial (5)
 - Ongoing: interactive polling
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Backgrounders for the public forum

Inform the public about the work of the committee

- Concise history of Natick govt structure
- Committee Charge
- Committee Activities
- Reports and findings
- Next Steps

Educate the public about municipal governance structures and how changes are made

- Community Paradigm presentation
- Other municipal resources
- Case studies