

Town of Natick - Town Governance Study Committee

Approved meeting minutes

April 3, 2023 7:45 PM

Via Zoom

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

Also present: Carl Valente, Bernie Lynch and John Petrin, all of Community Paradigm; Kristen Pope; Dom Malozzi

The meeting was called to order by Chair Gloff at 7:46 PM with reference to the regulations applicable to virtual public meetings, followed by a roll call.

### Public Speak

None.

### Public Forum

Josh will convene a group this week to finalize planning. Carol described the outreach that is underway.

### Conclusions on Additional Topics Covered on March 1, 2023

Bernie shared a slide on re-organization, picking up where we left off last meeting.

#### Re-organization

Town	Authority
Natick	Town Meeting or TA with Approval of Town Meeting
Franklin	TA with Approval of Council
Burlington	-----
Arlington	TM with Approval of Select Board
Needham	TM with Approval of Select Board
Andover	TM
Chelmsford	TM with Approval of Select Board
Lexington	TM with Approval of Select Board

#### Points of Considerations

- o Eliminates the time considerations of going to Town Meeting.
  - o Increases nimbleness and creativity...responsive to current needs and opportunities.
- o Reflects the function of internal operations being an executive function and not a legislative matter.
- o Select Board process of review and decision-making provides adequate transparency and appropriate check and balance to the Town Administrator.
- o If Town Meeting action is required for re-organizations, how does one provide a distinction between otherwise minor reorganizations vs more substantive reorganizations.
- o It is increasingly common to reorganize departments based on the current skill set of the individuals in the organization.

There was discussion about how Natick was uncommon in requiring Town Meeting approval for reorganizations, and examples of when that had happened or not.

Josh moved to recommend that authority to reorganize Town departments be centralized in the executive branch. Dan seconded. In discussion, Sue wanted to ensure that we provided some specificity in how that would be achieved, which may be accomplished later on. The motion was unanimously voted by roll call.

## Day to Day Authority

Bernie shared a slide on the topic. In Natick, this topic is covered in the Charter in the Town Administrator and the Select Board sections.

### Day-to-Day Authority

#### Natick

-The town administrator shall be the chief administrative officer of the town and shall be responsible to the Select Board for the proper administration of all town affairs placed under his charge by or under the charter and by-laws.

-The Select Board shall serve as the chief policy making agency of the town. It shall be responsible for the issuance of policy directives and guidelines to be followed by all town agencies serving under it and, in conjunction with other elected town officers, to develop and to promulgate policy guidelines designed to bring all agencies of the town into harmony. Provided, however, nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize any member of the Select Board, nor a majority of them, to become involved in the day-to-day administration of any town agency. It is the intention of this provision that the Select Board shall act only through the adoption of broad policy guidelines which are to be implemented by officers and employees appointed by or under its authority.

#### Lexington

The town manager shall supervise and be responsible for the efficient administration of all boards, committees, commissions and officers appointed by him and their respective departments. The town manager shall not, however, exercise any control over the discretionary power vested by statute in any such board, committee, commission or officer. He shall, in addition, supervise and be responsible for the efficient administration of any agency of the town not subject to his appointment and control, but only at such time and to such extent and for such period as the officials having control of such agency or activity may, with the consent of the select board, determine.

#### Andover

The Board of Selectmen shall be considered the makers of policy of the Town government, except as otherwise directed by Statutes or by the Town Charter. The Town Manager shall be responsible for ensuring that the boards, officers and representatives of the Town comply with policy determinations of the Selectmen.

#### Chelmsford

Powers and Duties. The executive authority of the town shall be vested in the select board which shall be deemed to be the chief executive office in the town. The select board shall be the chief policy making agency of the town and shall have all the powers and duties given to boards of selectmen or select boards as may be authorized by the laws of the commonwealth, the charter, bylaw or other town meeting vote, except those powers granted to the town manager under this charter. The select board shall prepare reports of town business and distribute such reports to all town meeting members. The select board shall act by the issuance of policy guidelines and directives. It is the intention of this provision that the select board shall act only through the adoption of policy directives and guidelines which are to be implemented by the officers and employees appointed by or under its authority. The town manager shall be the primary officer responsible for the implementation of policy directives and guidelines adopted by the select board. The daily administration of the affairs of the town shall be the exclusive responsibility of the TM.

#### Points of Consideration in adding Charter language related to day-to-day operations

- Provides clarity of authority to public, Select Board and department heads and employees.

Bernie noted that clarity of authority was important, and the separation of policy and administration was articulated in our charter.

After an initial discussion, there was no recommendation for a change; Hillary suggested that we need more clarity in this area, and there was further discussion.

Josh moved to recommend that the details of our governing documents relative to finance and operations are aligned with the principles articulated in the charter sections on the Select Board's limitations on day-to-day administration. Seconded by Dan and unanimously voted by roll call.

## Preliminary elections

Town of Natick - Town Governance Study Committee  
Approved meeting minutes  
April 3, 2023 7:45 PM  
Via Zoom

There are no other towns with preliminary elections. Some towns have caucuses to limit the number of candidates on the town ballot. Only Longmeadow, a city, has this provision.

Dan moved to recommend that we eliminate preliminary elections in our municipal election process. Carol seconded. It was noted that this was a charter change. Carol spoke to how her view on this had changed. By roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

## Communication and Citizen Engagement

Bernie shared a summary document.

### Communication and Citizen Engagement Municipal Best Practices

- Community Information/Participation Officer (in place)
- Communications/Engagement Processes
  - Inventory existing methods and evaluate to identify gaps
  - Cultivate relationships with community partners
  - Establish clear and consistent methods for participation and involvement
  - Use multiple methods for community engagement
  - Reach out to new homeowners (Welcome Wagon)
  - Understand the barriers that prevent residents from attending or participating
- Communicating through Documents
  - Town Report
  - GFOA-style Budget Documents
  - Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
  - Publish Bond Rating Report
- Use of Cable and Streaming
  - Broadcast meetings
    - YouTube
  - News and Updates with Public Access Shows
- Interactive Dashboards
  - ClearGov
  - Departmental Data
- Communication and Engagement Technology
  - Robust and Easily Usable Website
  - Mobile Alerts by subscription
  - Code Red Alerts
  - Electronic Billboards
  - Signage
  - Newsletters and Blogs
  - Social Media
- Empower Staff to address citizen concerns
- 311 system
- Citizen surveys and outreach
  - Coffee Hours
  - Different meeting locations
- Government/Citizens Academy (status)

John Petrin discussed the items on the page of best practices, and how standards and expectations have elevated in recent years and how changes in society, media and technology have increased the need for municipal innovation.

Town of Natick - Town Governance Study Committee  
Approved meeting minutes  
April 3, 2023 7:45 PM  
Via Zoom

Carl spoke to the first and last bullet. If a city or town could staff an engagement position, the items on this page could be more effectively realized. Restarting a citizen's academy would pay dividends, including replenishing the volunteer pool.

Carol and Linda noted that the academy was going to restart in the fall. Hilary was enthusiastic about this position and its potential. There was a lot of unfulfilled potential, but she was enthusiastic about our sustainability newsletter.

Dom expressed a concern that some committee minutes were not being posted and the Town was not upholding basic responsibilities.

Linda asked to include videos in the communications and engagement technology section.

Dan spoke to the need to stay current in this area and strive for continuous improvement.

Josh asked for something that was actionable by the committee. Bernie shared a Charter section prepared for Plymouth on Communications and Public Engagement. Josh further spoke to his disappointment that we had not made more progress. We will cover this at a future meeting.

In other topics under new issues, Dan suggested that we look at other models for our Finance Committee.

### **Meeting minutes**

Josh asked for a volunteer to recreate the minutes from March 27, which can be done from the recording. Michael agreed.

### **New Business**

We will meet on April 10 for the forum. We will meet again soon, please complete the Doodle poll. We will seek to resolve the issue of the improperly posted January 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Sue commented on the Amherst report, previously shared.

Linda moved to adjourn, seconded by Dan and unanimously voted by roll call at 9:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joshua Ostroff, Clerk