

TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Northfield Town Hall

Location

16 October 2018

Date

5:00 PM

Time

Meeting Minutes

Members Present:

Brian Brault, Barbara "Bee" Jacque (Clerk), Robert MacEwen, Tammy Pelletier (Chair),
Bernie Porada, Emily Stevens (Vice-Chair), Jeremy Underwood

Others Present: Julia Blyth, Alexander Meisner, Tracy Roberts, Heather Tower

Meeting began at 5:01 PM

1. Public Comment:

- List of Questions for Public Feedback (Rev. 2.0) distributed to all present.
- Heather Tower asked attendance at Friday, January 25th breakfast at the Senior Center for an informational update. Committee agreed. Will be interviewing Tower as a department head too.
- Brault served as moderator/facilitator in addressing questions to the SelectBoard members. Discussion and responses are summarized in the attached.

2. Old Business:

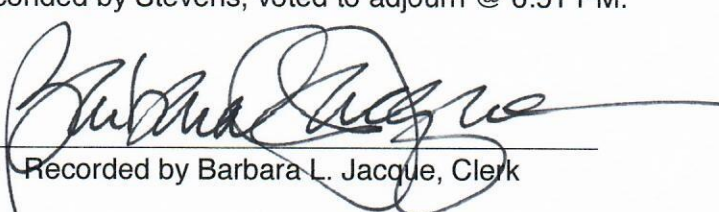
- Discussed next steps in soliciting feedback:
 - Brault reviewed list of Boards & Committees with Committee. Discussed how/when to interview given timeline + public forums + holidays.
 - Jacque to craft cover letter and repurpose list of questions as "survey" for email (digital copy) + for town mailboxes (physical copy) and USPS mail as needed
 - Pelletier will talk to Town Secretary re:
 - Create an official, separate town address for Town Governance
 - Determine what email lists are available to contact department heads and committee chairs
 - Reserve room for Public Information/Input Session
 - Points from Stevens et al: Be consistent, Send to chair, Provide identifiers where possible so can check off who has responded and who needs follow-up
- Due to time constraints, this item continues to move to a subsequent meeting: Review/discuss relevant topics from MacEwen in *Handbook for Massachusetts Selectmen, Third Edition* (published by Massachusetts Municipal Association © 1998).
 - Page 1, 5th paragraph, independent elected bodies
 - Page 1, 7th paragraph, selectboard member sizes
 - Page 2, 1st paragraph, boards' authority, **Executive Function**
 - Page 3, 4th paragraph, **Coordination and Strategic Responsibilities**
 - Page 23, **Studying Local Government**
 - Page 60, *Town Accountant, Treasurer, Collector of Taxes or Town Collector, Assessors*

4. New Business: none

5. Meeting time/schedule:

- Monday, October 29, 2018 @ 7 PM
- Thursday, November 15, 2018 @ 7 PM Public Session — day/time subject to room availability

7. On a motion by Porada, seconded by Stevens, voted to adjourn @ 6:51 PM.


Recorded by Barbara L. Jacque, Clerk

2018 TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE: QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK

2018 TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE: QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK WITH SUMMARY OF SELECTBOARD RESPONSES, 10/16/2018	
1	<p>Are you familiar with the 4 recommendations of the Town Governance Study Committee Final Report issued in October 2013?</p> <p>If yes, how?</p> <p><i>There is familiarity with the 2013 Final Report. Having online is helpful so people can read through the details and background of the recommendations.</i></p>
2	<p>The 1st recommendation was to create an “empowered Town Administrator” — a trained, experienced professional at the center of Town business who could represent the Town (e.g., managing personnel, negotiating contracts) and implement policies & priorities of the Selectboard. This was implemented in 2014.</p> <p>Do you think this was a positive development for the Town? Why or why not?</p> <p><i>Yes, this was a good idea. The TA provides guidance to Boards and Committees, employees. Serves as a point person and provides coordination & organization. The implementation of this idea is still a challenge, though. Some want an “empowered Town Administrator” more than others. We all want longevity and consistency in the position too.</i></p>
3	<p>Since implementation, do you have suggestions based on your experience — or the experience of your [operation, board, committee, department] — with the Town Administrator position? [With the Selectboard?]</p> <p><i>Engagement & coordination with county and other regional administrators.</i></p>
4	<p>On what priorities or issues should the Town Administrator be focused?</p> <p><i>Personnel is the first thing which is the hardest part to implement. Being effective and efficient and understanding the art & science of those skills. “Keeping us legal” — understanding the various regulations and laws and ensuring compliance. Day to day operation of town business. Developing & maintaining a relationship with the campus plus economic development.</i></p>
5	<p>In what ways can the Town Administrator better assist you or your [operation, department, board, committee]?</p> <p><i>Longevity, continuity. Not to play favorites — sets equal share of attention, time, and energy with everyone.</i></p>

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In what ways do you want the Town Administrator to be accessible to you or your [operation, department, board, committee]? Examples: time of day, day of week, meetings.

Accessibility has been good. Increase coordination across all Board meetings — share info, get everyone on same page. Department head meetings. All employee meeting aka “personnel meeting.” Focus on morale of town employees.

Discussed the need for evening hours, and possibly Friday hours, for Town Administrator and consistency across Town departments. Consider as recommendation in the 2019 Final Report.

7

The **2nd recommendation** was to change the positions of Treasurer, Tax Collector, Town Clerk, and Assessors Clerk from elected to appointed by the Selectboard.

The Treasurer & Tax Collector positions were combined into one position appointed by the Selectboard. Do you think this position should be appointed by the Selectboard? Why or why not?

The Town Clerk is still an elected position. Do you think this position should be appointed by the Selectboard? Why or why not?

The Assessors Clerk is appointed by the Board of Assessors. Do you think this position should be appointed by the Selectboard? Why or why not?

Treasurer & Tax Collector: Yes, appoint (vs. elect) people to “technical” positions, especially financial. Appointing ensures people with qualifications are in position, increases size of candidate pool, allows for regular search process and hiring procedures. Electing draws from a smaller pool: Northfield residents only with no guarantees about expertise for position.

Town Clerk: Yes, but on the fence. A similar rationale re: appointing can be applied to this position but it's important to acknowledge the checks and balance provided by electing the Town Clerk. It'll be helpful to get more feedback on this.

Assessors Clerk: Okay with appointment by the Board of Assessors but accountability & HR oversight is less clear. Example: who does performance review, how are complaints handled. Also, what to do with conflict of interest (or appearance) with positions where individuals serve employee and boss roles simultaneously. Perhaps HR oversight and practice should be a recommendation in the 2019 Final Report.

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8	<p>Other than zoning by-laws, Northfield has 12 pages of written legal rules: mostly about dogs, noise, driving, snow removal, and the right to farm. The 3rd recommendation was to compile a set of general government by-laws from which a policy handbook could be created. A policy handbook is useful for establishing operating procedures, resolving problem situations, and orienting new Selectboard and other town government members.</p> <p>Do you think this recommendation should be implemented? Why or why not?</p> <p><i>A resounding yes! Especially to capture and pass along institutional knowledge. And to clarify clear direction/ answers on key issues.</i></p>
9	<p>The 4th recommendation was to consider increasing the size of the Selectboard from 3 to 5 members at a future date. Do you think this should be implemented? Why or why not?</p> <p><i>"It's so maybe." If there were 5, there would be more people to contribute to discussion, to help, and to distribute the workload. Would it make communication easier — with quorum and open meeting law? If there are 3, it's easier to have a bigger voice, to be heard, to make a bigger contribution. With more positions, recruiting people to run is a concern. With the distribution of workload among more people, though, would it be easier for people to commit to being on the Board?</i></p>
10	<p>What is one thing you would like improved or changed in our town government?</p> <p><i>Increased communication (email as an example)</i> <i>A greater sense of teamwork.</i> <i>Longevity and consistency in the Town Administrator position.</i> <i>Clear organizational reporting structure — everyone needs someone to report to.</i> <i>A way of capturing institutional knowledge — the do's and don'ts, the can do and can't do.</i></p> <p><i>Possible recommendation for 2019 Final Report: Examine overlap of purpose & activities in Boards & Committees (can there be fewer), as well as size of committees. With fewer committees and appropriately-sized committees, it would be easier to recruit people and to establish quorum.</i></p>
10/16/2018 — REV. 2.0	