

TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Northfield Town Hall

15 November 2018

7:00 PM

Location

Date

Time

Minutes

Members Present: Brian Brault, Barbara “Bee” Jacque (Clerk), Robert MacEwen, Bernie Porada, Emily Stevens (Vice-Chair), Jeremy Underwood

Public Information/Input Session called to order by Stevens at 7:00 PM

1. Opening Remarks — Brian Brault reviewed purpose of session (input), focus of the committee, timeline, questions for soliciting feedback, and invited comments/questions from the audience.

2. Input from **2013 Town Governance Study Committee** members who were in the audience:

- Much was learned by visiting other towns, in particular they focused on towns with town-school / college relationships, as well as bylaws and policy handbooks.
- The main theme in establishing an “empowered Town Administrator” was accountability and having an experienced professional, on par with a school head or college president, who could represent the town and the Selectboard full-time.
- Their thinking was to increase the size of the Selectboard after the Town Administrator position was voted upon and implemented.
- Public sessions from 2013 are on BNCTV (<https://vimeo.com/bnctv>):
<https://vimeo.com/67147256> <https://vimeo.com/74681613>

3. Input/feedback on **Town Administrator (TA) position** summarized: (quotes are in *italics*)

- *Proof is in the pudding — 15 years ago, the town hall was a mess, hardly the place or professional environment needed to encourage economic development — even though the implementation has been uneven with the mixture of skills and experience, we need to keep moving forward with someone different and better experienced.*
- *Position is important as a point person in town — prioritization seems to be a key skill based on what is going on in the town.*
- Regardless of person in the job, availability of (accessibility to) the TA doesn’t seem to be an issue.
- Priorities: water & sewer — reservoir as source, 2 water districts, central role/oversight of these.
- *We want a TA who can stay; there’s a lot to love here; lengthy commute situations are not reasonable/sustainable & haven’t worked previously.*

4. Input/feedback on **Appointed vs. Elected positions** summarized: (quotes are in *italics*)

- The Treasurer & Tax Collector positions were not combined — in practice, they are two part-time positions held by one person. It does make sense that financial positions would be appointed. They are technical positions and there are regulations and practices to be followed.
- The Board of Assessors has the knowledge — they should appoint the clerk, but the relationship to the TA should be clarified, especially with respect to HR/personnel responsibility.
- The HR role of the TA in general and the reporting relationships need to be clearer.
- Benefits of appointing: larger pool size of qualified candidates, especially for positions requiring technical/professional expertise. *With electing, you run the risk of getting someone with less expertise & experience.*
- Downside of appointing: *Increases power of the Selectboard, especially a small board.*
- People could use more info on the Selectboard, e.g., role & responsibility, job description.
- *Appointing takes away ability of small town to have their say.*
- Benefits of electing: Checks and balance on the Selectboard.

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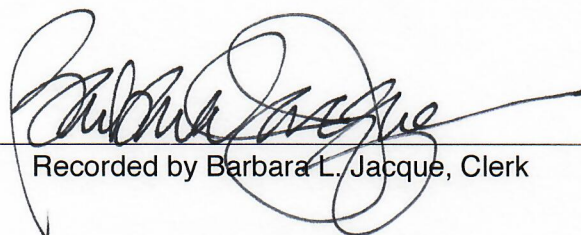
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5. Input/feedback on **Governmental By-laws** summarized: (quotes are in *italics*)
- Many said yes to this. *It's a good idea — just a question of creating & implementing and recognizing it's a big job with a lengthy timeframe and in need of resources (e.g., committee, consultant) over a realistic/lengthy timeframe (3-5 years). It's worth the effort.*
 - *Most towns have a policy handbook too. So people aren't starting from square one when new to a position, especially a selectboard member.*
 - More info is needed on current compilation efforts.
6. Input/feedback on **increasing the size of the Selectboard** summarized: (quotes are in *italics*)
- This was not acted on in 2013 because of the change in the town administrator position.
 - *No one wants to run so why increase the size but no one has the time because the work is distributed over 3 people instead of 5. The amount of work means someone needs to be retired or out of work. If we had 5, the workload would be more manageable and the size of the pool running would increase.*
 - *It seems the Open Meeting Law would work better with 5 members — on a 3-member board, 2 members meeting or appearing together outside of meeting is a quorum violation and there is no quorum if someone is absent.*
 - *With 5 members, you would have 2 more brains/minds added to the mix, especially on complex issues and when there are absences/illnesses.*
7. Input/feedback on **other ideas to improve town government** summarized: (quotes are in *italics*)
- Delegation of work — *a special project assistant should be hired* — the TA position is comprehensive (covers a lot) so it makes sense to have resources to delegate to, especially for projects that require time, thought, research, writing (e.g., grant writing, creating a policy handbook).
 - *Try a selectboard model where the 5 members are elected from 5 districts/wards. Have the model expire or institute a trial period after which the model is evaluated* (would need a charter change).
8. Meeting time/schedule:
- Thursday, November 29, 2018 @ 7 PM — Town Hall Auditorium
9. On a motion by Stevens, seconded by Underwood, voted to adjourn @ 8:16 PM



Recorded by Barbara L. Jacque, Clerk