

Harvard Charter Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 1, 2017
Upper Town Hall

Members present: Paul Cohen (Chair), Rick Maiore, George McKenna, Stephanie Opalka, Ron Ostberg, Charles Redinger, Cindy Russo, Peter Warren. Members absent: Sharon McCarthy.

Paul Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. After discussion, the minutes from April 25 and May 2 were approved as amended. The minutes from May 6, May 11, May 23, and 6/1 will be addressed at the June 15 meeting.

Summary of Town Administrator Tim Bragan's comments:

Draft Charter

Tim said the draft charter was thoughtful, well put together, and provocative – a good piece of work for people to comment on. He did not like the idea of two-year terms, but Paul told him the two-year-terms had been removed. Tim said he thinks the changes proposed will work. He recommended tightening the language in some areas. He will look at the draft revision that was distributed to the commissioners May 31 and will send his comments. Peter Warren will send Tim the document tonight.

Current Budget Process

Tim said that he supported the approach taken by the commissioners to have the Board of Selectmen (BOS) be responsible for the budget. He said that the change could direct disputes back to the selectmen, who are responsible for executing the town vision, and could generate more discussion before budgets are approved at Annual Town Meeting. New initiatives would be considered as to how they fit into the Master Plan and the budget.

Tim described the current budget process and his role in the process. The BOS does not offer any strategic guidance at the start of the process. At the end of September or first of October, the Finance Committee (FinCom) gives him a one-page sheet of budget parameter guidelines – level funding or level service – that are based on revenue and expense estimates that come from state sources and past experience. Then he meets with the boards and departments to help them put together their budgets. Some use their assistance; some do not. He and the Finance Director ask the preliminary questions that they know FinCom will ask. They create the budget book for FinCom.

After the FinCom review, questions come back to Tim. He goes back to the committees and departments, and then gives explanations to FinCom. In November, departments reporting to the BOS review their budgets with the BOS in public open meetings. By the end of December or first of January FinCom is reviewing all the budgets.

Tim and the Finance Director review budgets from groups that do not report to the BOS. Any new initiative requests from these boards go to FinCom. Cindy said the elected boards do not seem to have anyone to advocate for them, whereas the schools have the School Committee and

administration; the appointed boards and departments have the BOS and Town Administrator. Tim said that they offer assistance to the elected boards. Some use their help; others do not.

Proposed Budget Process

Paul said that the BOS would set the goals and objectives and Tim and his staff would prepare the budget, working with the appointed boards and departments. The BOS would review their budgets in open meetings. The budget would be given to FinCom by January 1 to vet in detail and to hold hearings over the next months. The BOS would present the budget at ATM and FinCom would give its recommendations. Town resident discussions and votes that followed would establish the final budget. The BOS would own the budget, which would tie into the Master Plan, and it would be accountable for the results.

George said he was surprised by the number of committees in town and saw some overlap between committees. He asked Tim if he thought some could be consolidated, which would reduce the number of volunteers needed. Tim said that a number of ad hoc committees have become standing committees and that could be looked into.

Rick asked what Tim thought about the commissioners' idea for a community development area, headed up by a town planner. That area would include the land-use boards, which are now one appointed board, two elected boards, and one planner. This would be under the jurisdiction of the Town Administrator. Discussion followed about how this whether this would be a bylaw or in the charter and how it could be structured and implemented.

In response to Charles's question about whether or not the charter would be revenue neutral, Tim said that it depends on how the charter is implemented. He said the committees would not be doing anything different and he would look at reorganization of the staff if necessary.

Tim said he liked the idea of a combined building inspector/facilities manager position. He does not see a conflict of interest, he said, because the inspector is identifying problems and insuring that they are fixed. There is no money involved. Tim said the issue becomes prioritizing the list of what needs to be fixed.

After the discussion with Tim ended, the commission briefly talked about the narrative that needed to be written to accompany the final charter. Stephanie said she would try to get copies of the charter narratives from Hopkinton and Groton. Peter said that Auburn might have one, too.

Charles said that in the most recent draft he changed the Moderator terms back to one year. He also deleted section 3.7 on town elections because it seemed redundant to 3.1. All changes will be discussed at a later meeting.

The next Charter Commission meetings will be June 15 to meet again with the BOS and June 29 to finalize the draft charter. Both meetings will start at 7 p.m. in the main meeting room, second floor of Town Hall.

Paul adjourned the meeting at 8:54 p.m.

Laura Andrews, Recorder