

Harvard Charter Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
February 23, 2017  
Town Hall

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

Paul called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. After discussion, the commission approved the 1/26 minutes as amended.

Ron reviewed his handout “A Narrative in Three Parts,” which summarized his view of the commission’s responsibilities, what the findings have been to date, and what remedies can be put in place to resolve identified issues. See Appendix: “A Narrative in Three Parts.”

Referring to Ron’s statement that the commission agreed that the town should have a charter, Cindy said she did not think they had agreed. She said that if all they do is codify what is currently being done, she does not see any benefit. She asked what the changes would be if they do not change elected to appointed positions. Ron replied that policy and budgeting should be in the same hands.

This led to a discussion about where the budget comes from. Charles pointed out that this was an example of why they should codify what is done. Not everyone understands how things work.

### **Budget Process**

George described the current budget process as being derived from department heads, funneled up through the Town Administrator (TA), blessed by the Board of Selectmen (BOS), and compiled by the Finance Committee (FinCom) after it does their inquiries and investigations. Sharon said that FinCom has cut money requested by departments before the request goes to the BOS. The BOS should make the decision, she said, because otherwise there is no overall responsibility in Town Hall when goals are not met because staffing needs have not been met.

Ron said that there is merit in having the BOS initiate the budget because the budget needs to tie into planning. In his mind, the BOS budget would go to Town Meeting, not the FinCom budget. Paul and George said that the two budgets would not be too different, because both use the same revenue assumptions.

One difference, Ron pointed out, is that the BOS meetings have more visibility than FinCom meetings. The BOS would debate policy as it relates to the budget, so more people would understand the issues. Since members of the BOS are elected, they could be voted in or out based on their positions on specific issues.

George said he does not think the BOS has the time to discuss all the budget issues. Ron asked if there are things the selectmen do now that are not executive functions. Hiring was mentioned as an area that could be delegated to save time for the BOS.

After further discussion about the current process and the need for a budget that ties to the town’s vision and goals, Cindy made the following motion, “The Select Board will prepare and present the capital and operating budgets to Town Meeting.” Sharon seconded the motion and

the commission voted eight to one to approve the motion. Peter suggested that FinCom and the Capital Planning and Investment Committee be told immediately about the recommendation.

### **Elected vs. Appointed Volunteers**

Earlier in the meeting, Cindy said that the structural change of having the BOS appoint volunteers to boards rather than having the residents elect them might help make government more responsible to volunteers' needs. George said that if the BOS makes the appointments, responsibility is funneled to one committee, not multiple ones. Ron added that if the BOS is appointing people, the selectmen are more invested in making it work, which means making enough money available to get the work done.

Cindy made a motion, which she later withdrew, that the library trustees continue to be elected because the library is its own world and operates like other libraries. Stephanie said that it is similar to the School Committee: their mandates come from state laws.

Sharon pointed out that one of the criteria in the study Ron handed out – see Appendix to 1/26 meeting minutes – was that elected officials have significant policy-making responsibility, which the library trustees do not have. Other comments made to support appointments include:

- If the BOS had responsibility for planning and spending, appointed boards would not have goals and missions that conflict with the BOS mission.
- If this is set up right it will encourage more participation on town boards.
- There would be greater efficiency and effectiveness with clearer lines of authority.
- Statutory regulations would protect development overzealousness with the Planning Board at the disposal of the BOS.

Some concerns raised about appointing volunteers included:

- Selectmen would have to actively manage the relationships with the boards.
- There would need to be safeguards to make sure that some boards, like the Zoning Board of Appeals and Conservation Commission, are completely independent.
- A more detailed recall policy might be necessary as a safeguard.

Rick suggested that the commission go through all the positions and write out the pros and cons of appointments and elections and set up a mechanism to get feedback. Cindy said that she thought the commission should note what it sees as issues and then take a position on how to resolve them. Ron said that there has not been enough groundwork laid yet for what the commission is trying to accomplish. He said that members need to decide how to get the word out and to give the rationale for decisions.

Cindy asked for a sense of the meeting: how many people are leaning toward appointments as the solution to management issues raised. Paul said that the right solution might not be politically attainable. The library has a strong constituency, like the schools. If we're too ambitious, he said, we could lose everything. Ron said that the commissioners are saying that we see a need to do things more effectively. "We listened to the boards and here is what we are proposing," he said.

The straw vote resulted in the following:

<u>Committee/Board</u>	<u>Should be Appointed</u>	<u>Should be elected</u>
Planning Board	7	2
Park & Recreation	8	1
Library Trustees	1	8
Board of Health	8	1
Cemetery Commission	9	0
Community Preservation Comm.	7	2
Warner Free Lecture	8	1
Constable	9	0
Tree Warden	9	0

More discussion will take place about votes with split results.

### **Communication**

George said that with only two meetings left until Town Meeting, it was critical that the commission have something prepared. He suggested that the commission provide a handout and that Paul give an executive summary explaining where the commission stands now and where it is going.

Cindy asked everyone to read the handout she and Sharon prepared to be able to discuss it at the next meeting.

### **Draft Charter**

- As Article 3-5: Voluntary and Appointed Boards is currently written, all boards will have three members. That should be removed.
- In Article 3-2 (a) Composition, Term of Office of Select Board, the terms have not yet been discussed and agreed to.
- Park & Recreation is still an open issue that needs to be discussed.
- Article 6: Finance and Fiscal Procedures will change based on today's vote. Paul will update it.
- Ron's January 26 email "Four Thoughts for Discussion" relates to the duties of the Select Board and needs to be discussed so it can be incorporated into the draft charter.

The commission still needs to review the draft paragraph by paragraph. It was noted that the draft is still an un-reviewed draft.

### **Next Steps**

- Paul – update Article 6.
- Paul – prepare draft of executive summary for Town Meeting
- All – review Cindy and Sharon's handout.
- All – review Ron's "Four Thoughts for Discussion."
- All – send Cindy thoughts on 3.2: Select Board.

Next meetings: Tuesday, March 7, 7 p.m. and Thursday, March 16, 7 p.m.

Paul adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Laura Andrews, Recorder

APPENDIX

**"A Narrative in Three Parts"**

Harvard Charter Commission

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**1**

Perform Overview

1. Two observations strongly suggest a formal Charter would be valuable
  - Current governance documents are dispersed and incomplete
  - The documents do not accurately reflect current practices
2. Two observations indicate that the Selectman-Town Meeting format is appropriate
  - Most towns the size of Harvard use this format effectively
  - A volunteer driven, self-government is broadly endorsed

Draw Conclusions

**A formal Charter, in the Selectman-Town Meeting format would be a valuable Town asset**

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**2**

Identify Issues

1. Input from citizens-at-large reveals frustration
  - Inadequate coordination of agencies effects performance and morale
  - Conflicts in goals and objectives are not uncommon
  - Insufficient transparency impacts performance and deters participation
  - Low level of accountability also effects performance and participation
2. Input from members of Boards and Commissions
  - Resources, both personnel and financial, are often inadequate
  - At times, Executive support is inadequate

Establish Objectives

**Identity ways to integrate planning, improve management and increase citizen participation**

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**3**

Propose remedies

1. The roles and responsibilities of the Executive should be expanded and clarified:
  - Integrate planning, policy formulation and budgeting
  - Manage policy implementation and resource allocation
  - Report goals and performance
2. The terms and tenure of the Executive should encourage service on BOS

Draft Charter language

**Expand and clarify the Executive's involvement in Planning, Management and Reporting**

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