

Minutes of Public Meeting
Committee to Study the Number of Selectmen
September 12, 2017
Room 1, Town Hall, Belmont

2017 OCT 16 AM 9:27

Members attending: Maryann Scali, Laurie Graham, Ralph Jones, Debra Deutsch, Dan Halston, Amy Trotsky, Michael Crowley, Andrew Plunkett, Lynn Reed, Paul Rickter, Judith Feins, Peter Whitmer, Doug John

Members absent: None

Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes
2. Debrief of comparable town research
3. Organize questions for Belmont selectmen interviews
4. Review of League of Women Voters report on the number of selectmen
5. Planning for October 12 public hearing
6. Next Steps
7. Review of meeting dates (Sept 26, Oct 3, Oct 12, Oct 17, Nov 7, Nov 21, Dec 5, Dec 19, Jan 9, Jan 23)
8. Adjourn

Meeting Notes

1. Approval of minutes

The minutes were so approved, with one correction, that Peter Whitmer was incorrectly listed as having missed the August 8 meeting. The notes will be updated accordingly.

2. Debrief of comparable town research

We reviewed the various towns. Some verbal, some electronic – the chair will collate.

Acton Summary (Debra Deutsch)

- 5 members, 3 elections (2-2-1 sequence)
- Past 5 years, typically 1 more person running than open seats. There was a case recently of 4 for 2 seats – the only one with real dollars. Most recently all filed that they spent nothing. In that case where it was competitive, only one spent 2k. So typically they don't spend money.
- Typically meeting length is 2 hours. Every committee has a liaison from the board of selectmen.
- They have a town Manager, as administrator. Debbie says according to the charter, they have a strong manager (e.g. has direct reports).

Arlington (Maryann Scali)

- The office has a big presence – it's a prominent part of the building.
- Town has a AAA rating, and a population of 42,000
- The structure is 5 selectmen, 3 year terms, most run unopposed

- After 2016 there were no health benefits for selectmen.
- The chair has a \$3500 salary and the rest \$3000.
- 8-9 weeks of meetings, and TM can last 7:15 to Midnight. In summertime they meet only 1x a month, then every other week.
- The town has a DPW but no light board
- They have a town manager, and an assistant town manager
- The town has fewer town meeting members per precinct
- There are 110 committees and no ex officio's.

Concord (Ralph Jones)

- 5 person board (2-2-1 sequence, same as Acton)
- In the past 5 years, everyone ran unopposed. In recent cases they had turn outs of 3%, 9%.
- It seems to Ralph that the people must be happy, as there's a lack of controversy and politicking.
- They have open Town Meeting, and 400-500 people show up. It typically runs 4-5 nights
- The Town Manager appoints, and is the GM of the light department (they have the authority to run the department)
- There are 50 committees, with 10 appointments each assigned to liaise.
- All expenditures go through the selectmen, based on recommendation from town manager.
- It was unknown at the time if they have salary and benefits

Hingham (Dan Halston)

- 3 person Board of Selectmen, with 1 elected per year
- 30 or more committees, and a liaison arrangement
- For election spending, \$34k and 18k spent a few years ago. In other years \$10k and \$15k – so significant money.
- There 48 meetings, about 1.5-2 hours
- They have other elected committees, like school
- They have a town manager.
- They were looking to expand to 5 Selectmen the last Town Meeting, and voted it down. There were 2 major issue:
 - 1. If not broke, don't fix it
 - 2. Open meeting concerns. They thought Selectmen would use it as a means to deliberate without open meeting (so 2 meet then meet with another etc.)

They clerk said this was the 5th time they considered it. The Selectmen voted 2 to 1 voted against it (with a voice vote against it in TM).

- Ralph asked if this is a stepping stone to state office. That would explain the election costs

Lexington (Maryann Scali)

- 5 selectmen; they follow a 2-2-1 election sequence
- They office has no salary or benefits. No term limits.
- Yet in elections they spent \$8-12k in contested races. When uncontested, they spend less than \$500
- They have a large tax base, including commercial and residential, and have a AAA rating
- Board meets every other week, and once a month over summer
- Maryann heard the BOS feels overworked and stressed
- They have a representative TM
- There is a town manager, who serves 3 year terms

Marblehead (Amy Trotsky)

- 5 selectmen, and they serve 1 year terms
- Most run unopposed. Occasionally they might have 2 running for the same seat. When they have 2 or more running for the same seat, they might spend a few hundred dollars. Generally little money is spent.
- They follow an open Town Meeting, and a town manager.
- They town has a AAA rating
- They meet 2 times a month, with some special meetings. Most meetings seem under an hour
- There are many committees and departments. Most are elected, though some appointed.
- Amy got the impression they didn't play a large role. For instance, they don't have to serve on any boards.
- Judie Feins suggested that a strong Town Manager might determine strength of the BOS position.
- We talked some about whether a lack of debate really meant a well-functioning board and town. Some felt they could be neglecting harder, longer-term issues.

Marshfield (Michael Crowley)

- 3 member board, with 1 elected per year
- Town has a AA+ rating, and about 25k residents
- In terms of elections, in 2017 5 were vying for 1 spot. In 2015 3 went for 1 seat
- Board meets 2-4 times a month. Typical length is 1.25 hours.
- Lots of boards and committees, but unclear from the site about the selectmen role on committee
- They have Open town meeting

Milton (Laurie Graham)

- 3 selectmen, with a Town Administrator, and a representative town meeting.
- They spend \$5k – 25k on an election, so some involve serious expenditures.
- Other committees have BOS representatives, like representative on the warrant committee meetings. It did seem though that while they may be on the committee it was not guarantee they were always present.
- The town has a AAA rating

Stoughton (Andrew Plunkett)

- Went from 7 down to 5 Selectmen in 1982.
- The town has about 27k residents.
- They have strong manager
- Town Meeting convenes in May.
- BOS is at large for 3 years. They appoint the town manager.
- They reported that policy deliberations remained the same after the switch from 7 down to 5. The main advantage was that recruitment was easier, while a larger number leads to more involvement, and more factionalism.
- The races were not that competitive. They office has no stipend, no benefits.
- BOS meetings are typically 3 hours, 2 times a month
- They felt there was more stability with a 3 year board. They were happy not to be at a 7. Work still gets shared, but still felt there was some disparity, and the chair can dictate the agenda more.

Wakefield (Michael Crowley)

- 7 members on the board, serving 3 year terms. The town elects 2 then 2 then 3.
- Town has an AA2 rating
- Elections were very competitive. In 2017 6 ran for 2 openings. In 2016, 6 ran for 1 seat (as part of a special election). April 2012, 5 ran for 2 seats
- Board meets 2 times a month, with meetings lasting typically 1.5 hours
- Lots of committees but Mike couldn't tell from online data about their level of participation
- The town population was 25k in 2010, according to Wikipedia.
- They have an Open Town Meeting

Westford (Dan Halston)

- 5 person board, elected for 3 year terms, in a 2-2-1 election cycle.
- Town has a 21k population
- Elections were somewhat competitive. In 2017, 3 people ran for 2 spots, in 2016 3 ran for 2, and in 2014, 4 ran.
- Meet about 3x a month – 2.5 to 3 hours each
- There are about 35 committees where the Selectmen act as liaisons
- There is a town manager

Winchester (Laurie Graham)

- 5 person board, elected for 3 year terms, in a 2-2-1 election cycle.
- They have a town manager, and a representative town meeting
- They do have contested elections
- Typically the BOS meets 2x a month. There were however many executive sessions.
- There are other committees that they sit on. They liase but don't necessarily participate.

General Discussion

- We then spent a little time talking about planning board suit, and whether we could get an opinion from town counsel. Lynn thought she might ask for council's opinion. In Winchester at one point they talked about "working session" meetings in 2014 after the public meeting, but given controversy they didn't appear after that.
- With the conclusion of the reports, Paul will gather the reports, including notes from verbal presentations, and he will distribute.
- When putting those together, Ralph would like to add voter turnout percentage to any spreadsheet. Was surprised at the very low percentages in some, like well less than 10%. This would be for local town turnout only (as national elections always bring out more voting). Belmont runs in the 20+%, but certainly not in single digit. That can be high in 30s when overrides, and then in the 70s with national election.
- We talked a little about running for other boards, and whether that also can contribute to voter turnout, as well as people running. Laurie said that most towns have elected town planning boards. Judy wondered about whether candidates skew older, as they may have more time. Contrast that with school committees, where younger candidates are more personally motivated.

3. Interview selectmen (past and current)

- We talked about fleshing out the general questions to what we want to ask the town selectmen.
- Ann Warner will be added to the list of selectmen to interview
- We asked what questions are related to the number of selectmen, directly. We felt we can start with the factual, then delve into the speculative, which will be opinion throughout, versus examples of how many hours they spent.
- We talked about the role of the chair, and agreed that most towns rotate.

Fact-based questions

- Hours per week.
- Is there too much workload?
- Which committees did they sit on, and actually participate?
- Can you break down your time – reviewing for Town Meeting, working with constituents, working with town admin. How much prep and how much meeting time?
- When you were serving, what was the open meeting law, and how did it affect you as a selectman?
- How did you allocate work? What was the division of labor, with respect to committees and departments?
- What involvement did you have with town departments?

Opinion-based questions

- Do you think having subcommittees be more efficient with a 5 person board?
- If the town had a town manager how would that change the work of the BOS?
- Did you feel overworked as a BOS member?
- (add the 5 questions from the list as well)3,4,5,6 from the spreadsheet.
- What are the pros and cons of moving to a number greater than 3?
- Why did you run?

General Discussion

- 2010 is the open meeting law. So we can see the Selectmen that are overlapping, to gauge how was their work before and after.
- Paul suggested we email out the questions and follow up with any interesting responses. We will warn them that it will be a public document, but also based on convenience that we could talk to them instead.
- We spent time on the effect of the open meeting law, and to what it extent it affected the BOS. Ralph felt that in the past, there was a high degree of pressure not be stickler, because they said they felt they could always redo the meeting and get the same result. So they old timers wouldn't care as much about following the letter.
- Ralph talked about the light board. With deregulation, the work exploded. In Concord they have a light department, and don't have the issues we have. The light board here has BOS seats, and is a significant amount of work.
- Ralph said when he served they tended to defer to those with expertise, so to Andy with construction expertise. Maryann said that was not always the case in the past.
- We agreed that there are other issues. Paul will try to edit these down, as we felt more than 10-12 questions would be too much. We thought we should email out the factual and then follow up with more opinions.

4. Review of league of women votes

Maryann will send that out (pre 2010)

5. Planning for public hearing (next meeting).

Will be in the selectmen's room

6. Next steps

- Paul send template
- Those who did reports will fill out and send to Paul, and Debbie will collate.
- Laurie will work on publicizing the public meeting with Franklin.

We adjourned at 9:07 pm.