

Minutes of Public Meeting
Committee to Study the Number of Selectmen
December 5, 2017
Room 1, Town Hall, Belmont

Members attending: Maryanne Scali, Laurie Graham, Debra Deutsch, Dan Halston, Michael Crowley, Andrew Plunkett, Lynn Read, Paul Rickter, Judie Feins, Peter Whitmer, Doug John

Members absent: Ralph Jones, Amy Trotsky

Agenda

1. Approval of minutes
2. Review of any remaining comparable town research
3. Review of responses from committee chairs and department heads
4. Review text of arguments for status quo and for larger number of Selectmen
5. Initial discussion on possible recommendations
6. Other business
7. Next steps
8. Adjourn

Meeting Notes

1. Approval of minutes

Call to order: 7:06

Minutes: Approved

2. Review of remaining town research

Discussed Selectmen's role in Arlington. In a vacancy, the moderator and the remaining selectmen in 30 days appoints another until the town election for the remainder.

Talked about interview with former moderator, Mel. He felt like 5 on the BoS were less likely to spend time with division. Didn't think more would greatly increase his work load. Paul read Ralph's interview email.

3. Review of responses from committee chairs and department heads

Talked about responses from the committee chairs:

- Generally low response
- Some felt like they didn't have contact normally. They would appreciate a liaison to pay attention (e.g. visioning committee).
- Some department heads felt that they didn't need to be micromanaged by the BoS
- Some committee chairs answered but not as many as we would have liked

- Arguments were felt to amplify some of the existing rationale and provide color, less than any new information.
- We were looking for specifics about interactions, and not generalities.
- If a reminder goes out asking for more input, we'd like to ask for more specifics.
- Paul to ask the Town Clerk for reminder email, with plea for specifics.

4. Review text of arguments

General Reaction

These were felt to be a first draft, that will inevitably be whittled down.

Judie liked the specificity.

We had cautions about over generalizing from a few data points. Personalities and Belmont are different, but there are some data points and aggregations we can make.

Some felt that we've learned a lot of interesting facts, but not necessarily any compelling reason from those that moved to 5. We didn't encounter any town that felt like it was broken, except Stoughton – who went from 7 to 5. There are tradeoffs and risk / benefits – and the value of the perceived benefits given those costs.

Some other points include:

- In Acton, 5 was felt to be more resilient, and ease the entry in the role.
- In Belmont Public meeting, the big counter was “if not broke...”
- We have a very strong town meeting, and now we have Town Manager candidates.

Specific Comments

A) We'd like to add a point about socio/economic and age diversity.

How does diversity make the town better?

Check the numbers and date them.

B) If there's a liaison situation, it would be good at least to be there; that alone would be an improvement.

Collapse B and L? Distinguish outward facing work versus inward facing (e.g. K)

C) Add ability to send 2 selectmen when needed: 1 -two different kinds of expertise; 2-having two people listening for better understanding; 3-delegation of two communicates importance.

Reorganize L to be inward facing with regards to Belmont. Argument B is within community; C is with other communities. L would come before B & C

D) Be careful with “would” and “could”. Currently only 1 person in our BoS has open hours, and we no longer have open time at BoS to speak out at the meeting.

E) Expand the last sentence to include family responsibilities and other duties.

F) Peter to develop and send.

G) A subset of H, and could be combined? Perhaps add a more clear opening statement, or perhaps reverse the paragraphs.

- H) Combine with G
- I) List Hanover as an example – add a parenthetical reason.
- J) Call out the opposing arguments in the same argument?

A better label than efficiency. Synergy and the benefit of having internal discussions.

- K) Incorporate data view that more people and time equals greater capability (but still not 1:1).
- L) Refine argument – expand the first and trim the second – to be more inwardly / town facing.

With 5 have the capacity to cover for one another.

- M) 4 is better than 2 or 3, if there should someone absent. If there's 4, they can take some action. If one cannot be present...
- N) This came up from Adam Dash as a problem. We wondered how to quantify this though, and have a "handling" metric.

In our report we shouldn't talk about the new Town Administrator about to be hired.

- O) Depends on external things, so the language should be "may" but not "likely". Some towns – especially if a lot of outside meetings – may actually decrease it.
- P) Not perceived to be broke, is the argument here. Always easier to keep doing what you're doing, and using the systems that you have. There's a process by which candidates are developed and made to be qualified. All but 2 selectmen we've interviewed, have said it's fine.

Stability versus disruption in perhaps the cons. The flip side is that other towns (majority) have changed. There is cost and a risk of change – keeping the status quo reduces the amount of unknowns.

- Q) A smaller board has a higher social pressure to attend – less chance of the free rider.

A counterpart to M. We may want to link arguments.

- R) Combine with T?

Our elections cost too much, so add to E.

- S) Peter to write
- T) Combine with R
- U) Consensus is beneficial. More examples of this are on a 3 year board than on 5. We feel better about 9-0 votes than 5-4, so there's some inherent advantage to consensus.
- V) A lot of towns don't pay or are taking away benefits. Say that if they were to remain the same, then potential benefits exposure would increase.

Note that other towns are phasing away benefits, and it's the trend to take away benefit. Add a note that if you pay them (even a \$1) then they have to offer benefits.

For the final report, we should add Chapter and Verse to the argument, for the citation.

- W) Larger board would be weaker, so a smaller board is stronger.

We didn't think that a larger board is weaker and *causes* a stronger TA.

X) Get from text from Q

Items 5 and 6

We ran out of time, so skipped discussing Agenda Items 5&6 until the next meeting.

7. Next Steps

Next meeting on the 20th, a Wednesday.

Next: think about recommendations, including the number of Selectmen, whether to have a stronger TA, and possibly eliminate benefits, as examples of recommendations we could make. Our charge was for the number on the board, but we can include related as "other recommendations."

Also, if you have a sentence recommendation, send it to Paul, and he'll send it out anonymously.

8. Adjournment

We closed the meeting at 9:08.