

November 8, 2021 Minutes  
Town of Sharon Finance Committee Meeting

**Present:** Daniel Lewenberg, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Anja Bernier, Arnold Cohen, Brian Collins, Gordon Gladstone, Charles Goodman, Ira Miller, Jada Wang.

**Not Present:** William Brack, Ann Keitner.

**Also Present:** Rob Carver, liaison for the Governance Study Committee

**1. Dan Lewenberg, Chair, gave opening remarks:**

- a. This meeting is being held via remote means through the Zoom online platform pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021.

**2. Governance Study Committee Discussion – Rob Carver:**

- a. The Governance Study Commission (GSC) was assembled in late summer to do a 10 year periodic review of Sharon government structures, prompted by a citizen's petition, to see where improvements can be made.
  - a. The Select Board (SB) has elaborated on and prioritized tasks for the GSC
  - b. The GSC have created seven questions for Town boards and committees to answer
  - c. Each GSC member is serving as a liaison to one or more Town bodies
  - d. Approximately 20 people were nominated. All submitted resumes and were interviewed. The SB selected 11 of them to join the Committee
- b. Will evaluate specific duties of the Finance Committee in relation to warrant articles and fiscal oversight and make recommendations as to the adequacy and appropriateness of current practice
- c. Some topics directly related to the Finance Committee are:
  - a. Which structural aspects of your committee are most important to retain, and why?
  - b. What, if anything, would you recommend changing?
  - c. Could you identify significant obstacles to voter engagement?
  - d. How can governance keep up with the changing demographics of residents?
  - e. What are the pros and cons of enlarging the SB?
  - f. Should the Finance Committee continue to make recommendations on all warrant articles or just on financial ones?
- d. Members of the Finance Committee discussed that the formal description of what they do isn't necessarily sufficient, particularly with regard to its role in financial oversight. They would like to update it to make it more applicable and accurate, and feel it would be most appropriate for the Finance Committee to update this themselves
- e. The Committee also likes its large size, with up to 12 members. Feel that this is beneficial to represent the wider range of Sharon residents and is helpful to handle a large workload at busy times.
- f. Discussed that the process people go through to become Committee members feels efficient and appropriate. A Town resident applies to be a Committee member and their resume is reviewed by a 5-member nominating committee, as assembled by the Town Moderator. Agree that it's important for members to have a financial background, as they are expected to do complex financial analyses of the Town's finances. The slate of nominees selected by the Nominating Committee get voted on at Town Meeting.
  - a. Members have 3-year appointments to the Committee because there is a long learning curve
- g. The Finance Committee is an oversight committee that is not beholden to the Select Board
- h. Discussed that Zoom has been good for members of the Committee as well as residents. Remote access seems in step with current life, and conducting meetings on Zoom is helpful for working adults, parents, etc. There may be some technological obstacles to holding meetings that are a hybrid combination of remote and in-person
- i. Feel that recommendations made by the Committee are to be decisive rather than neutral. Could consider that some should be written up by other Town bodies and not

necessarily by the Finance Committee where appropriate. However, almost all articles have some financial impact, so it may be most appropriate to continue writing up all warrant articles as is current role of the Committee

- j. May be helpful to new Town residents if there was some form of document outlining Town structures, committees, etc. Could find new residents through new voter registrations from the Town Clerk's office
- k. The Governance Study Committee is working on assembling data. No repository exists for Town Meeting attendance but we do have voter participation records. Limited turnout historically for Town Meetings – participation rate is typically 2-4% in recent years
- l. A flaw with the Town Meeting structure is that sometimes a special interest group will work on a certain issue and move the vote a certain way, especially when overall turnout is low. Discussed there is no perfect answer, and there are pros and cons to each type of voting structure
- m. Committee members were largely in favor of expanding the number of Select Board members to five. Discussed that there is enormous pressure on the existing 3 members because so many duties are expected of them. It is also difficult for 3 people to represent the interests of diverse Town residents
- n. Mr. Carver gave out his email address and encouraged people to contact him regarding the Governance Study Committee: [Robert.Carver@comcast.net](mailto:Robert.Carver@comcast.net)
- o. Mr. Lewenberg discussed that the Town Meeting date may be the first Monday in May, and that the Select Board will be setting the date come January
  - a. There is no perfect day or time to hold Town Meeting. Saturdays, Sundays and evenings can all be problematic for meeting attendance. Consensus that if there is a better time than a weeknight it could be put in the bylaws
  - b. Whatever date and time is determined to be best for Town Meeting, it would be best if it could be held consistently at that time each year to enable residents to plan ahead for it
- p. There is a new school superintendent, business manager and payroll person. The Finance Committee expressed that they would like to provide them with as much support as possible.

### **3. Liaison updates:**

- a. Schools – Dan Lewenberg:
  - a. Sharon Schools meeting on the 21st for financial updates.
- b. Standing Building Committee - Gordon Gladstone:
  - a. High school project is moving along according to schedule. Are getting close to all buildings being weather tight and have placed 5 large heaters onsite so that people can work in the buildings during the cold winter months
  - b. Football field is completely sodded
  - c. There are indicators that there may be supply chain issues with obtaining furniture. The architect is working to stay on top of this
  - d. Still on schedule to finish in June.
- c. Library – Chuck Goodman:
  - a. Cheryl Weinstein discussed that the Zoning Board has to file their decision with the Town Clerk by November 19, and then there is a 20 day appeal period. July 2023 is the deadline for shovels in the ground
  - b. Commended Cheryl and Gordon Gladstone for representing extremely well. It is a work in progress, and has been a slow and difficult process
  - c. The Library is looking forward to returning to in-person programming
  - d. As of September 21<sup>st</sup> the Town has spent \$52,454.60 on legal fees, which includes the amounts charged by the ZBA, the Trustees and the Standing Building Committee.
- d. Planning Board – Arnie Cohen:
  - a. No update.
- e. CPC - Patricia-Lee Achorn:
  - a. No update.

**4. Minutes to be Voted:** None.

**5. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair in 48 hours:** None.

**6. Adjournment:**

**Motioned:** by Patricia-Lee Achorn, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier to adjourn. **Voted:** 8-0-0.  
Meeting adjourned at 9:29pm.