

SHARON GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 12, 2022

The meeting of the Sharon Governance Study Committee was called to order at 7:35 pm by Chair Paul Pietal.

Member attendance

Arguimbau: Present	Carver: Present	Geller: Present	Goodman: Present
Keenan: Present	King: Present	Monahan: Present	Pietal: Present
Rangarajan: Absent	Silverleib: Absent	Wluka: Present at 7:45	

Minutes

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the December 15, 2021 meeting.
(Goodman - Geller)

Arguimbau: Aye	Carver: <i>Abstain</i>	Geller: Aye	Goodman: Aye
Keenan: Aye	King: Aye	Monahan: Aye	Pietal: Aye

7-0-1 **PASSES**

MAPC Presentation and next steps

Mr. Pietal stated that he felt that many towns seem to be similar and the numbers appear to be consistent. Ms. Monahan felt that MAPC could help with surveys and getting feedback. The next step would be to have either the Town Administrator or the Select Board execute the draft letter requesting consideration in the next funding round in February.

Mr. King inquired whether these services would have to be put out to be in a competitive market. The group had no definitive answer but the Town Administrator would know. Mr. Keenan has not yet reached back out to the Collins Center to discuss their next steps but is happy to do so.

The draft letter was reviewed via screen share and the consensus was to proceed with the execution.

MOTION: To approve the draft letter to MAPC and request the Select Board authorize its release.
(Wluka - King)

Arguimbau: Aye	Carver: Aye	Geller: Aye	Goodman: Aye
Keenan: Aye	King: Aye	Monahan: Aye	Pietal: Aye

Wluka: Aye
9-0-0 **PASSES**

Subcommittee updates

The Town meeting subcommittee has met twice since the last GSC meeting. Mr. Keenan reports that Michael Dutton, Bridgewater Town Manager, chair of the Form of Governance committee for MA Municipal Management Association, and Town Moderator Andy Nebenzahl attended as guests. Each spoke about their areas of expertise and preferences.

Mr. Dutton explained that local governments are trying to better manage risk and granting more power to Town Administrators and Town Managers. He explained that an open Town Meeting is a Massachusetts tradition. Some communities sometimes have trouble meeting quorum, some have issues with a learning curve for those attending Town Meeting, consistency in decision making. Mr. Dutton has had no experience with representative Town Meeting, but rather with the council/manager form of government. He felt that the perceived strengths of the council/manager form of government would be clarity and efficiency. Town Council tends to have more expertise which has benefits for long-term strategies. He felt the downside to changing from open Town Meeting is that some people miss it.

It was also discussed how members of various boards are placed and the size of a typical council. When asked about how to increase attendance at Town Meeting, Mr. Dutton feels that after the pandemic lifts, attendance may increase due to citizen involvement virtually. He did give a bit of advice which was, as this committee makes recommendations that it do so with a forward-looking focus.

Mr. Keenan explained that he has been doing some local research which revealed that this committee is the sixth group to study governance since 1962. It was interesting to go back and look at news clips from *The Sharon Advocate*. Much of the same work was undertaken in the same way and asked the same questions of the same people. It was striking how often this has come up. He is preparing a presentation that he will share with the committee at a future meeting.

The subcommittee met most recently with Andy Nebenzahl. Mr. Nebenzahl spoke about the charter review commission. He also gave advice on not trying to do too much. While things need attention, don't try to paint with too broad a brush. He mentioned that the addition of the consent agenda has cut a considerable amount of time from the Town Meeting process. With respect to the charter proposal, he stated he might not vote the same way this time around. He feels committed to open Town Meeting. He wonders if the charter failed because it was too complex. He talked about the need for improved communication or more education, although it may be somewhat difficult to do that. Electronic voting may be a good tool but expensive. Wayland has used electronic voting effectively. With regard to a manageable crowd, he felt that it was a non-issue. Mr. Nebenzahl also opined that the Town can do more to overcome childcare issues.

The Boards and Committees subcommittee met last Wednesday. The focus of the meeting was whether to proceed with surveys, or whether perhaps a listening session better way to engage residents. Mr. Pietal stated that at some point, the committee must have people come speak and offer their thoughts. It was asked whether this was what MAPC could do for the committee.

Mr. Pietal asked whether the group has talked about their opinions on a 3 or 5 member Select Board. Mr. King said they had informally, but wish to engage more with residents before attempting a deeper discussion.

Liaison reports

Ms. Arguimbau explained that the Planning board is drafting a response to the questions asked. Mr. Pietal stated that the Personnel Board also spoke briefly about their responses as well.

Remote meeting legislation

Ms. Monahan had asked to include this topic for the Committee to consider. There is a sunset provision in the existing legislation for virtual meetings and if not extended or altered to allow hybrid possibilities, meetings will return to in-person in April. She wished the Committee to consider perhaps bringing in the Town's legislative delegation to discuss the possible future direction, perhaps beginning with Mr. Phillips as he is a Sharon resident. The Committee agreed that Mr. Pietal should extend an invitation to Mr. Phillips.

Update on identification of peer communities

Mr. Carver provided an update on research he has done on how best to compare peer towns for governance evaluation and presented slides with the data. The information was included for the group in their meeting materials as well.

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting

At the last meeting, a memo from the Town Clerk about the process of posting was circulated for the committee to review. It was mentioned that the official posting site is the Town Hall vestibule and Mr. Hogan recommended leaving it due to complications with power and internet outages. However, it was discussed that perhaps the Select Board may consider a formal policy that a courtesy copy be posted on the Town's website. The feeling was that this information has already been circulated to Boards/Committees. Before taking action, the Committee would research whether an existing policy is in place.

Mr. Pietal advised that the next meeting of the full committee would take place on Wednesday, January 26 at 7:30 pm.

Adjourn

Seeing no further business to come before the committee, Mr. Pietal adjourned the meeting at 9:10 pm.