

SHARON GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

Public Forum held at Sharon Community Center

June 14, 2022

The public forum of the Sharon Governance Study Committee was called to order at 7:30 pm by Chair Paul Pietal.

Member attendance

Arguimbau: Present
Keenan: Present
Rangarajan: Present

Carver: Present
King: Present
Wluka: Present

Geller: Present
Monahan: Present

Goodman: Present
Pietal: Present

Opening Statements

Mr. Pietal introduced the committee members and briefly summarized the charge of the committee, laying out the three major areas that the Select Board has assigned to the committee. Reminded those present that this committee is a research and advisory body.

Mr. Keenan described the work of the Town Meeting subcommittee, explaining the three legislative options available under state law, and detailing the nature of research undertaken thus far. Described the work of the subcommittee to date.

Mr. King explained the work and background of the Committees subcommittee, reviewing the focus on the size of the Select Board and whether particular boards should be appointed or elected.

Mr. Pietal described the purpose of this public forum, seeking input from community members. Acknowledged presence of two representatives of the MAPC.

[as of 7:50 pm, there were 22 people on Zoom and 29 in the room]

Public Comments

Carol Abram (on Zoom) raised issue of lodging a complaint against an appointed official, or a process of removal of an appointed official. We have no current process to recall or remove an appointee. Believes that a 5-member Select Board would permit better oversight of an appointed official.

Joanne Michalek (on Zoom) asked about pros and cons we have come across in our research re: 3- vs 5-member select board. Mr. King summarized the issues in response.

Rob Maidman asked if our research discovered towns that changed the size of their select boards. Response by Mr. King – not aware of any towns reducing their board sizes, and a few have proposed enlarged.

Mr. Wluka referred to MAPC representatives in attendance, one of whom remarked that their research for Sharon is in early stages.

Xander Shapiro spoke in support of 5-member select board, citing several advantages. Comments that Open Meeting Law constrains a 3-member board from having subcommittees to do complex work. Also notes that 5 members would permit greater representation of the town's diversity.

Jennifer Illuzzi (Zoom) favors enlargement of Select Board, for better representation. Cites high barriers to participation in Open Town Meeting, finds printed town warrant difficult to comprehend. Believes that a RTM would be better, as would remote participation.

Donna West (Zoom) noted that RTM in her hometown was not representative. Argued for OTM as only remaining direct democratic body. Can do a better job of explaining warrant items.

Ben Feinberg (Zoom) Asked if any Sharon other town boards have 3 members? Under OML consultation outside of meeting is impossible with 3 member boards. Likes OTM but recognizes it as discriminatory because not everyone is able to attend. Perhaps add forums to allow for explanation, input, and voting. Also recommends new by-law re: meeting notifications to include web, social media.

Patty Keenan: really need to make town meeting more accessible to families with children at home. It is ironic that Sharon attracts resident who want to raise children here, but then cannot participate in OTM.

Joanne Michalek (Zoom): Would prefer to allow remote participation and remote voting.

Ellen Boardman: OTM works as well as it does now because of low participation; if there is a contentious issue that attracted all voters, it would not be viable. Newcomers to New England who aren't familiar with OTM and are disadvantaged.

Rob Maidman: Town Moderator has considerable power, which limits citizen opportunities to receive an answer to legitimate questions. Also notes that practice of calling the question disenfranchises many. Notes challenges of board sizes.

Sam Liao: supports Open Town Meeting. Allows people to participate when there are issues that move them. People value the right to participate. Suggests electronic voting on site; change date to start on a Tuesday. Transfer responsibility of maintenance of the library to the DPW from the Lib Trustees.

David Blaszkowsky (Planning Board) Key issue for the Gov Study committee is to generate more interest, more participation in governance. Ombudsman function could be valuable.

Lajos Kamocsay – (DEI committee) biggest issue is access. Likes the model of separating discussions from voting. Suggests improving communications. Provide secretarial support to all committees. Keep Town Clerk an elected position. It is important to find better ways to increase participation on boards and committees. Planning board 5-year term is daunting. Doesn't think size of population should drive decision about size of select board.

Margie Mitlin – notes problem of town meeting attendance where people come for one issue then leave, and other important issues get decided by handful of voters. Cites an issue that arose in DEI committee to set values and expectations for members of town boards, to increase accountability.

Donna West (Zoom) Praises creative suggestions raised tonight. Encourages committee to continue search for creative improvements and ways to overcome the impediments to remote voting and participation. Pursue legislation to permit such things.

Wrapping up

Mr. Pietal thanked everyone for suggestions and conversation. Many of the ideas raised have already been discussed in committee meetings, which is edifying, but it was helpful to hear some new ideas.

Ellen Boardman asked about findings from the ATM survey. Mr. Carver and Mr. Keenan provided some key findings.

Adjourn

Mr. Pietal thanked everyone for participation and adjourned the meeting at 8:59 pm.