

SHARON GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Boards Subcommittee MINUTES

July 13, 2022

The Boards Sub-Committee meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Phillip King.

Member attendance

King: Present

Monahan: Present

Goodman: Absent

Wluka: Present

Pietal: Present

Approval of Minutes

Minutes of June 29 were approved 2-0-0.

Select Board Discussion with Former Members

Colleen Tuck and Bill Heitin joined the meeting to discuss their experience as former members of the Select Board. Ms. Tuck served from 1976 to 1988 and Mr. Heitin served from 2004 to 2022.

Mr. Heitin believes that the Town government works very well. He stressed that ultimately it is the Town Meeting that renders the decisions. He stated his preference for a 3 member Select Board. He feels that structure has served the Town well. He compared Sharon's experience to other communities with 5 member boards that he is familiar with. His observations point to 5 member boards being more political and less collaborative overall, making it harder to get things done. A prime example given was the manner in which our current Town Administrator was relieved of duties in another town by an effort of a Select Board where 2 members created a political platform. Regarding the inability to speak with other members when there are only 3, he indicated that is not a problem since members can talk with each other as long as they are not deliberating and making decisions.

Mr. Heitin also pointed to the strong overall structure of Sharon's government. He specifically noted the success of the Priorities Committee and Capital Outlay Committee. He also noted that the Finance Committee works well with other boards and committees. The Economic Development Committee was called out for providing the Select Board with great information.

Mr. Heitin also noted how important it is for the Select Board members to talk with the broader community to gather opinions.

Mrs. Tuck concurred with Mr. Heitin's overall summary. She also noted that 5 member boards are more inclined to "horse trading" to accomplish goals that one member may find important. She pointed out the stability that our current 3 member board provides by having the member in their 3rd year be the chair of the board. This heightened visibility gives the Town the ability to better understand if the person should be re-elected if they choose to run again.

Ms. Monahan questioned whether a 5 member board would help with the individual member's time commitment. Mr. Heitin noted that the strategy is for the Select Board to "divide and conquer" to spread the tasks equitably. He also pointed out that there are many fewer public events than there had been in the past.

Ms. Monahan noted that we had an abundance of strong candidates for this year's open seat. Mrs. Tuck noted that the fact that open seats typically draw more interest, concurring that the candidates this year were very strong. She also mentioned that the Select Board are the executives and that having a strong Town Administrator and department heads is critical.

Mr. King inquired on whether a Town Charter would be an improvement. Mr. Heitin indicated he would like to see the Town move towards a Charter to formalize our Town structure.

Mr. King provided input from former Select Board member McGrath, indicating he would like to try having a 5 member board. His opinion is that he always felt that the other two sitting members acted as one. Mr. Heitin disagreed with that statement. Mrs. Tuck added that it isn't a bad thing if members get along, making for more collaborative environment.

On the topic of the Finance Committee, Mr. Heitin feels that it has done a good job overall. Perhaps 11 members might be too many and he would like to see more turnover of members. He stated that it is critical to have a good Finance Committee Nominating Committee. Mrs. Tuck added that the wide range of perspectives is important for the Finance Committee, just as it is for the Standing Building Committee.

Mr. King asked about the possibility of term limits, noting that Norm Katz was on the Select Board for 36 years. Mrs. Tuck replied that the residents kept re-electing Mr. Katz because they felt he was doing a good job. She added that she doesn't support term limits.

MAPC updates

Mark Fine from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council updated the committee on his team's work to date. He provided a summary of the makeup of Finance Committees and Personnel Boards in 5 similar towns: Hopkinton, Southboro, Wayland, Acton and Holliston. He noted that Sharon has the largest Finance Committee of all the towns. He also mentioned that Personnel Boards are not required and that some town's have started to move the functions to professionals on the staff of the towns.

On the topic of removal of members of boards, Mr. Fine noted that Southboro has a provision for removing Finance Committee members for attendance issues and Acton has a recall provision for Select Board members.

Town Wide Survey Update

The survey is in process with a total of 417 responses so far.

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting

None.

Adjourn

Seeing no other business to come before the committee, Mr. King adjourned the meeting at 9:34 pm.