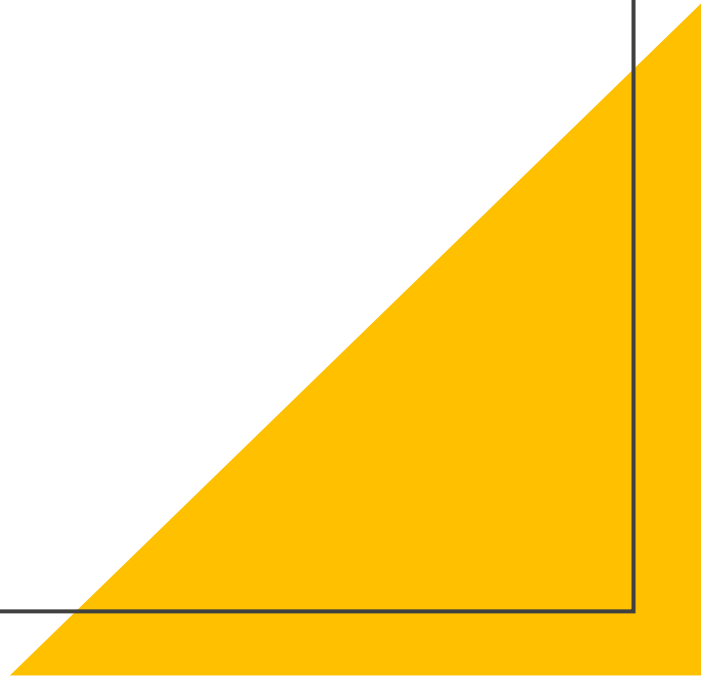


Government Study Initiatives in Sharon

1962 to 2006



1962-1967

DAY, APRIL 19, 1962

Committee Organizes

Tuesday evening the Town Government Study Committee held its first meeting and organized as follows: Frank I. Sullivan, chairman; Amanda Gelpke, secretary Other members are Alfred Powell, Edward Berger, Wilfred Howe, William Eastman and Carl Whittier.

The committee will study the town manager form of government, possible change from our present town meeting to representation form of town meeting, and will also make a study of consolidation of various town offices. Their report is due in March at the annual town meeting.

Sharon Advocate,
April 19, 1962,
p. 1

SHARON LWV QUESTION BOX

"Does Sharon need a Town Manager?" will be one of the typical questions under discussion 9:30 Wednesday morning, November 18th and at 8:30 Thursday evening, November 19th when Sharon League of Women Voters' study groups take "A NEW LOOK at Town Government Structure"

Rapid population growth and the complexities of administration in ever-expanding towns, have brought forth three variations on the Selectmen type of local government in Massachusetts

- 1 Public works Consolidation.
- 2 The Town Manager Plan.
3. Selectmen-Executive-Secretary Approach.

These have been adopted in one form or another by over-worked Boards of Selectmen and the voters of an increasing number of Towns.

A Town Government Study Committee appointed 2½ years ago by the Moderator has been steadily at work on these questions and will doubtless have an article in the Warrant or other action requiring the Town's vote at our March 1965 Town Meeting.

The League of Women Voters will conduct a continuing study, discussion and evaluation of these three types of government as they might apply to Sharon. In view of possible Town Meeting action, the League seeks information and consensus of opinion during the coming weeks and months.

Visitors are welcome.

Amanda Gelpke, chairman
Committee Members:

Pat Murphy
Pat McManus
Marilyn Kahn
Nancy Hays
Doris Stone
Mickey Cashman
Doris Ahnberg
Jean Temple
Cynthia Fox

Sharon Advocate,
November 12, 1964,
p. 2

New Executive Secretary Assumes Duties

J. Maynard Austin, Sharon's new Executive Secretary, has assumed his duties at the Selectmen's Office on the 2nd floor of the Town Office Building. In the newly-created position he will serve the town as a full time administrator for the Board of Selectmen.

He has been a resident of Mon-

LEGAL NOTICES

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS PROBATE COURT

Norfolk, ss.

To all persons interested in the estate of Samuel Rich late of

roeville, Pennsylvania, for the past year while studying for his Master's Degree in Public Administration at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh. He has had extensive experience in municipal government, including the positions of Town Manager in Williamstown, Mass from 1957 to 1964 and in Houlton, Maine from 1950 to 1956. A graduate of the University of Maine, he is a professional Civil Engineer. He and Mrs. Austin and their two children

will reside on Bluff Hill Road.

As voted at the Town Meeting in March of this year, following a report of the Town Government Study Committee and the recommendation of the Warrant Committee, the position of Executive Secretary was created to (1) centralize executive authority and provide full time administration for implementing plans and policies formulated by Boards and Committees and (2) provide effective continuity coordination and control for Sharon's town government.

Sharon Advocate,
September 2, 1965,
p. 8

The Town Government Study Committee

The Town Government Study Committee has circulated a petition to place on the ballot for the March Town Meeting the question of transferring the responsibility for the Board of Health's functions to the Selectmen. Thanks to the help of the members of the League of Women Voters and of the Warrant Comm., and others who have cooperated, the necessary signatures have been obtained. The Town Government Study Committee thanks both those who have signed the petition, and those who helped in circulating it.

The Board of Health is a very important and responsible body. It covers much more than just garbage collections and percolation tests for sewage disposal. A couple of weeks before Town Meeting, a pamphlet will be mailed to every voter, along with the Town Warrant. This pamphlet will explain the recommendations of the Town Government Study Committee and why a "YES" vote on the question on the ballot is urged.

The situation in regard to the Board of Health is complex and difficult. Reduced to simplest terms, the many varied and important functions of the Board of Health may be divided into Policy and Performance.

For Policy, an Advisory Board of Health is proposed. This would be a five man board including members of the present Board of Health and two additional members. This enlarged board, with primary responsibility for studying and recommending on the health needs of the Town should contribute importantly to the general situation. Dr. Griffin has tentatively consented to serve as Chairman of this Advisory Board.

Performance is an administrative function. Competent, on the spot attention is needed. The Executive Secretary to the Board of Selectmen is a natural for this. And since he is the employee of the Selectmen, it is recommended that the responsibility for the operation of the Board of Health be vested in the Selectmen, who will delegate responsibility and authority to the Executive Secretary as seems appropriate.

Executive Secretary was called upon to work on this. As a result of the combined efforts, the situation, while not cleared up, was definitely improved. However, the Board of Selectmen and the Executive Secretary are sure that both for the present and the future, this can be handled with much less time and effort, and much better results, if the Selectmen have the full authority, rather than the present somewhat indefinite combined effort between the Board of Health and the Selectmen. In other words, it will be simpler and better if the Selectmen act as Board of Health.

This is an important issue. It cannot be adequately covered in this brief explanation. The whole matter will be presented in detail to interested Town groups, including the League of Women Voters. Further information will be published. Town Government Study Committee Members will be glad to answer questions. Voters are urged to study the pamphlet which will be mailed with the Town Warrant. A wise decision by an informed electorate can have vital effects on the health of every citizen of Sharon.

Sharon Advocate,
January 13, 1966,
p. 10

1987-1990

New group to study government

by Pat Goudey

The newly-established Government Study Committee held its first meeting Tuesday to begin examining governmental structure in Sharon. Created by a vote of Town Meeting last April, the committee consists of seven members appointed by the School Committee, Warrant Committee, Personnel Board, the Town Moderator and Selectmen. Their first order of business was to determine why Town Meeting asked for this study.

Judith Katz, appointed by the School Committee, suggested that the reason the town wants a government study is because they feel something is not working and they want to pinpoint the trouble spots.

"Is the basic premise that we exist (because) Sharon

government isn't working?" she asked.

Anne Carney and Allen M. Garf, both appointed by the Selectmen, thought the committee should first find out how the government is functioning and then decide if recommendations for improvements should be made. They did not believe Town Meeting was necessarily giving a vote of no-confidence to the present government.

Selectmen placed the article creating this committee on the April Town Meeting warrant after reviewing information included in a Management Study of the Financial Operations for the Town of Sharon, prepared last spring by Kennedy Shaw Associates of Boston. While that report concentrated on the town's financial management, it suggested some areas for change, including

possibly switching from Open Town Meeting to Representative Town Meeting. The Shaw report also recommended further study of our present government before making changes.

"That report, if taken on face value would change the government structure of Sharon to be town manager as opposed to the selectmen form," said Mrs. Katz.

On Tuesday, the Committee decided to look more closely at the how Sharon's system functions.

"What we should be talking about is more than financial operations because financial operations don't stand on their own. We should look at the entire government structure," said member Patricia Zlotin, appointed by the Warrant Committee.

continued on page 2

Sharon Advocate,
September 10, 1987,
p. 1

Government study

Continued from page 1

The committee will start by reviewing definitions of our government structure, which is headed by an administrative board of selectmen with an executive secretary employed to execute their directives.

They will also look at other forms of town government and talk to heads of government in neighboring towns to learn how alternative systems work.

Mrs. Katz also said Sharon functions with by-laws but no charter. The Committee will look into the advisability of establishing a charter commission.

After setting the dates of September 29 and October 6 for their next two meetings,

the committee decided to begin by interviewing Sharon department heads, including Town Executive Secretary Benjamin E. Puritz, Treasurer Frank M. Savino, a member of the Board of Selectmen, Town Moderator George E. Donovan, Town Counsel Manuel Katz, and Town Clerk Shirley S. Davenport.

The April Town Meeting vote also requires the study committee to hold four open forum meetings during the year to present their findings to the townspeople. The committee agreed that if they do

see a need for change, public education will be necessary to carry it off at future town meetings.

They discussed sending out a survey, perhaps enclosed in a mailing from the Town Clerk's office, to find out how townspeople view the government.

Community involvement

"We need to reach out and try to get the community involved," said Ms. Zlotin. She suggested holding public forums in the Community Center or the Library.

D & D REMODELING

"Customize Your Home?"

★ ADDITIONS ★ BATHROOMS ★ KITCHENS

★ Local References ★ Fully Insured ★ License #042175

CALL 784-2856 ASK FOR DON

Town government needs further study

Has Sharon outgrown its form of government? Is the town, at population levels topping 15,000 people, too large for a volunteer administration and Open Town Meeting? Is there enough accountability or are financial decisions spread too thin?

These questions and more are currently under study by order of 1987 Town Meeting as the Government Study Committee got underway this month. Their task is to study the governmental structure of the town and the duties of the town officers and to make recommendations for consolidation or merger of some of these responsibilities if they deem it wise. This is no simple task and the results of this study, and recommendations derived from it, could affect the life of every resident in the town.

Town Meeting also directed the committee to hold four open forum meetings during the year to present their findings to townspeople, rather than springing the study on Town Meeting all at once. From the looks of the work the committee has ahead of it, this was a wise directive.

At their first meeting, they defined their role and set the agenda for the next few meetings. They will interview department heads about town procedures and speak to officials of nearby towns about their government structures. They'll review legal descriptions of our form of government and of alternatives available to us. And they will gather information from the townspeople about how the people feel their government is functioning.

They have their job cut out for them, but if it is to make any difference, Sharon residents will have to turn out for the open forums to learn about government in Sharon so they will be able to vote on the committee's recommendations at Town Meeting. These are decisions about the very basic nature of the government we want to run our town. It's too important to leave it to someone else.

Sharon Advocate,
September 10, 1987,
p. 4

Hopefuls Speak Out At Candidates Night

by Pat Goudey

Voters got a chance to look over the field of election hopefuls last Monday at a Candidates Night sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Sharon.

Eleven candidates for ten town-wide offices gathered in the meeting hall at Stony Brook Court to discuss issues with about 40 constituents who came out on a rainy night to see who they will vote for town elections coming up on April 6.

Martin Badoian, running unopposed for reelection to a three-year term on the School Committee, said he is seeking another term because he is involved in projects now that he hates to leave unfinished, but he said this will be his last campaign. In answer to a question about drugs and suicide among the young people in Sharon, Mr. Badoian said Sharon schools have a curriculum to address those issues, but they can't do it alone. He said society must shoulder the responsibility and families must deal with the issues at home, also.

Planning Board member Thomas C. Houston, also unopposed, seeking a second five-year term, fielded questions about the Planning Board's growth rate by-law article coming up for consideration at town meeting this month over Warrant Committee objections.

Mr. Houston said he believed the Warrant Committee originally rejected the by-law because it did not adequately address provisions for multi-family unit development. He said the Planning Board has prepared amendments to the article addressing those issues.

It is, in fact, our policy to encourage diversity of housing," he said.

Irene S. Kaufman and Ellen B. Schoenfeld are vying for a one-year term on the School Committee, finishing out the unexpired term of member David Essenthal, whose resignation became effective April 1.

Mrs. Kaufman stressed her desire to use her professional training and experience as a teacher, counselor and school administrator for the benefit of Sharon students. Ms. Schoenfeld said she

is seeking to make the workings of the school system accessible to parents and townspeople, drawing on her education as a teacher and her experience with East Elementary Alternative School.

Norma Katz, running for reelection to a three-year term on the Board of Selectmen against challenger Harold Nodell, said the job of selectmen is a difficult one that he and his present colleagues take very seriously.

During questioning, Mr. Nodell criticized the government study article coming up at April Town Meeting, saying that he doesn't think another study is necessary.

"Too much money is thrown around in studies," he said. If something is needed, he said, it should be put in an issue and brought before town meeting without resorting to further studies.

Mr. Katz defended the study article, saying modern-day town government is too complicated to make quick decisions. Information is necessary in order to make good choices, and even though Sharon is run by competent, dedicated people, there is always room for improvement.

Town Meeting moderator George E. Donovan, running unopposed for reelection, was asked for suggestions to increase attendance at town meetings. He listed several suggestions, including holding the meeting during the daytime, but he did not think that would be successful. He said he would not support a move to change to representative town meeting.

"With representative town meeting, you find you still have quorum problems," he said. When the warrant contains issues of grave importance to the township, he said, people turn out to have their say and when the issues are more administrative, with little leeway for alternatives, fewer people come out.

Mr. Donovan said voter education plays a part, especially coverage of the issues in the media. "With the change of management at The Advocate, the news is more aggressively pursued," he said. "(This) will increase Town Meeting attendance."

Sharon Advocate,
April 2, 1987,
p. 3

Government Study panel elects co-chairs

The Government Study Committee is moving ahead to gather information on how Sharon's government is designed to work, and how well it's working.

The committee elected co-chairmen Alan Garf and Anne Carney Tuesday night before their first round of interviews that included Selectmen Chairman Colleen M. Tuck, Town Clerk Shirley Davenport and Town Executive Secretary Benjamin E. Puritz.

"We had quite a lively discussion going," said Government Study Committee member Judith Katz. "It was really interesting. The work of this committee is going to effect of the lives of everyone in Sharon for years to come. We're pushing for a public information meeting very soon."

The committee will contin-

ue their interviews next week with Town Treasurer Frank Savino and Town Meeting Moderator George Donovan. A third interview has not been locked in yet, Katz said. Voters at last

April's Annual Town Meeting directed the committee to hold at least four public forums to present their information to townspeople before Town Meeting comes up again next spring

Glaser, Titlebaum & Connors, P.C.

is pleased to announce
the reassociation of Attorney

DONALD S. GLASER
on a full-time basis

Howard W. Glaser
Joseph E. Titlebaum
John X. Connors

Robert Babchuck
Patricia K. McEnany
Gayle S. Ghitelman

(617) 784-7771

77 Pond Street, Sharon, MA 02067

77 Church Green, Taunton, MA (617) 823-7771

Sharon Advocate,
October 1, 1987,
p. 5

Lively Session Marks End of 1987 Town Meeting

by Pat Goudey

Town meeting voters were a fiery lot this year, but once they made up their minds, they stuck to it. For the second time last Thursday, voters refused to reconsider a controversial vote. Wednesday's session refused to reconsider opening the Mountain Street landfill. At the opening of the third night of deliberations, Cindy Mathias of 57 Aspen Road asked the approximately 100 voters present to reconsider the decision to fund preparation of fire substation plans for either Hampton Road or Mountain Street.

Ms Mathias said she supported the planning process but she wanted to strike the street references from the warrant article and add the phrase "on any suitable site." This would let the town rethink where it will build the substation if the proposed sites prove unsuitable in the future.

Even though Fire Chief James A. Polito said he had no problem with the change as described, voters held to the original decision and refused to reconsider the article.

Voting was uneventful for the next few articles, including raising \$50,000 for a state mandated updating of tax assessments, but the fur began to fly during consideration of article 29, which called for a government study committee to assess town government and to recommend any changes at next

year's Annual Town Meeting.

Planning board member Thomas C. Houston accused selectmen of encroaching on planning-board prerogatives in the past and of shutting the planning board out of the proposed study committee. The warrant article provided for seven members, two appointed by selectmen, two by the personnel board, two by the warrant committee and one by the moderator. There was no provision for a planning board appointee.

Mr. Houston also said he was concerned that a study committee might recommend changing Sharon's open town meeting form of government - a change he said he would oppose.

Selectmen Chairman Colleen M. Tuck protested that the warrant article is not "a beastly attempt to usurp power." She said she resents being told what the study committee will recommend by a board that complains they are not even represented on it.

When planning board member George B. Bailey spoke in favor of the study, adding that this would be his last year on the planning board, members of the board applauded his leaving. Mrs. Tuck offered him sympathy during his last few months tenure. To Mr. Bailey's embarrassment, it turned out he has two more years on the board anyway.

Planning board member Martin A. Levitt thought the

study committee was a good idea, but he wanted it to include representatives of all major elected elements of town government. He suggested an eleven member committee, including two members appointed by the planning board, and two by the school committee.

Voters seemed to agree with Francis J. Condon of 2 Pleasant Park Road, who said eleven members are too many. They held the number to seven. When the article passed, it included an amendment by John F. Lilly of 31 Woodland Street, that the committee publicize and conduct four open meetings during the year.

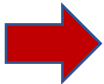
The warrant committee said their support of the study committee does not mean they think town government is obsolete or tyrannical. All in all, the proceedings were lively if they lacked decorum.

Articles 39, 40 Defeated

The planning board came in for more disappointment when their growth rate by laws, articles 39 and 40, went down to defeat.

Both the warrant committee and Mr. Bailey, who took a minority view on the planning board, claimed article 39 would have "a draconian effect" on development in the town. The warrant committee said the by-law would impose a moratorium on building.

Sharon Advocate,
April 30, 1987,
p. 3



CONCERT TUNER

Two officials oppose change in TM structure

by Paul Vitali

Two town government members offered their opinions to the Government Study Committee (GSC) Tuesday night when the Committee convened in the Selectmen's meeting room. Moderator George E. Donovan and Board of Assessors member Robert A. Merritt appeared before the Committee to answer questions regarding their roles in town government and to add input to the Committee's growing information bank.

The GSC, created by a vote at last April's Town Meeting, is interviewing representatives of various governmental offices in order to assess the town's present government and make a recommendation

as to whether or not a change is needed.

Thus far the Committee has heard from Selectman Colleen Tuck, Executive Secretary Benjamin E. Puritz, and Town Clerk Shirley S. Davenport along with Donovan and Merritt. They will next meet Tuesday, Oct. 27, and hope to hold the first of four required open public meetings on Nov. 17 at 7:30 at the Sharon Public Library.

Merritt told the Committee that the state grant-funded study which gave rise to the GSC had, in his opinion, a weak base of argument concerning his position.

"Kennedy Shaw started with an incorrect premise," Merritt began, explaining that the premise was that the Board of Assessors was part of a finance structure of town

government, and that there should be "interaction" between the Board of Assessors, Town Treasurer, and Town Accountant.

After explaining his position as an assessor and the inner workings of the Board with respect to the state Department of Revenue, Merritt commented on the system of open town meeting.

"I like open town meeting," he said. "Everyone has a chance to speak."

Town Meeting Moderator Donovan also had some input regarding open town meetings, over which he presides.

"I don't think we are going to accomplish any good for the town by changing the existing town meeting system," Donovan said. He does not approve of instituting a "quorum" regulation for Town

Meeting.

The Committee, represented by Co-Chairman Allen Garf, Judith Katz, Patricia Zlotin, Arnold Kublin, and Edward Berger, discussed other types of government with Donovan, as well as the issues of "recall provisions" for officials and moving the date of Town Meeting.

Informed votes

Donovan noted that he favors public, oral debate of articles over "summarized" written ballot articles. He said a ballot vote "will not be as informed a vote" as one held at Town Meeting.

Donovan concluded his interview with some advice for GSC members and voters alike.

"Just because there is a study does not mean that there is a clarion call to bring about a change," he said.

Sharon Advocate,
October 8, 1987,
p. 9

Town's Government Study Committee getting some more input

by Paul Vitali

An informative and informal meeting of the Government Study Committee allowed the members to listen to the ideas and feelings of several citizens a week ago Tuesday (Nov 17) at the Community Center.

The meeting, the first of four public forums, attracted only 13 Sharon residents. But this low turnout helped transform the formal assembly into a friendly gathering.

"Ultimately, everyone sat in a circle," said Judith Katz, the School Committee representative to the Government Study Committee. "It was very, very pleasant."

She noted that during the holiday season, it is difficult to attain the desired attendance. Katz said the meeting

was covered on the local cable television channel, and, hopefully, more residents watched at home.

"We did very little talking, and a lot of listening," Katz added. She noted that the Committee heard input from long-time residents Jim Leonard and George Bailey

The Government Study Committee was charged by the last annual town meeting to explore the present town government, and to assess and evaluate other alternative forms of town government. The Committee will report any findings and recommendations to next year's town meeting.

"Any decision to change what we have will be inter-

esting," Katz said. She added that she felt that "people

seem reasonably satisfied" with the present system.

Menus

Schools

Monday, Nov. 30: Tuna on a roll, three-bean salad, apple crisp, milk or juice.

Tuesday, Dec. 1: Steak-um on a roll with peppers and onions, pork-fried rice, marble cake, fruit, milk or juice.

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Hot dog on a roll, baked beans, carrot and celery sticks, cookies, fruit, milk or juice.

Thursday, Dec. 3: Macaroni with meat sauce, french bread, all-green salad, blueberry cake, milk or juice.

Friday, Dec. 4: Pizza (plain or pepperoni), buttered corn, potato chips, assorted desserts, fruit, milk or juice.

HESSCO

Monday, Nov. 30: Beef stew with vegetable and potato, oatmeal bread, fresh fruit.

Tuesday, Dec 1: Chicken leg cacciatore, noodles, green beans, whole wheat bread,

peaches.

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Swedish meatballs with gravy, escalloped potatoes, carrots, roll, pears.

Thursday, Dec. 3: Juice, macaroni & cheese, broccoli, rye bread, pears.

Friday, Dec 4: Baked fish with creole sauce, whipped potato, peas, oatmeal bread, fresh fruit.

L & J OIL CO.

PAY CASH and SAVE

344-2617

LEO McGOWAN

BURNER SERVICE

Canton Hadassah's 25th Anniversary

Celebrate with

"A Friend Feels Your Pain"

Sharon Advocate,
November 25, 1987,
p. 2

Committee seeks space, input

by Melody Howard

A meeting of the seven member Government Study Committee (GSC) scheduled for Tuesday night had to be cancelled due to a lack of meeting space in the Town Office Building.

Committee Co-Chairman Anne Carney said the session was re-scheduled because, "We haven't been able to get any place to meet."

The meeting was to be held in the office of the town accountant.

When the GSC is able to get together next, its topic of discussion will be the letters and comments members have received from Sharon residents regarding the structure of town government. Carney said the GSC has received about 12 letters, and she personally has gotten several phone calls.

"We solicited the input, particularly at the Special Town Meeting," Carney explained. "We will discuss whatever comments we

have received."

One of the letters to be discussed was from Grove Avenue resident Lori M. Leiderman, who has proposed restructuring Town Meeting. "I was so aggravated after the last Special Town Meeting," Leiderman said. "I feel very strongly that we should have some kind of change, especially with the fiscal problems the town is facing in the future.

"I don't know what they're going to do with my letter. I just want some opening of discussion of whether our town is being run efficiently and whether our town will continue to run efficiently in the future."

Leiderman has proposed making Town Meeting a forum for discussion and debate only, with the actual voting on issues taking place by secret ballot at a later time. This change, she said, would make voting accessible to residents who find it difficult to get to several nights of late-night meetings.

"I really like the idea I came up with," Leiderman said. "It's just a question of whether it's going to be allowable by the state of Massachusetts. The state only has certain types of government that they recognize as town governments, and I think if we try to take the one person-one vote system away in Sharon, some people won't go for it. What I came up with is a kind of compromise."

Leiderman is researching whether her proposal would be valid under state law.

Carney said the GSC also is examining whether to institute a representational town meeting for Sharon.

"We are trying to interview people who are representational Town Meeting members in other towns to see if that makes a difference," she said.

The GSC is not planning to invite the authors of letters they've received to its next meeting. Instead, the committee will read the letters and comments and decide what to do with them at that time.

Sharon Advocate,
December 31, 1987,
p. 3

Will town vote on representative government?

by Pat Goudev

The Government Study Committee (GSC) wants to bring two questions to the Annual Town Meeting in May, one on the election ballot and one to the Town Meeting floor.

The committee, which met last Thursday, is checking into regulations to permit a non-binding referendum question on the May 3 general election ballot asking voters if they prefer Open Town Meeting or Representative Town Meeting. The GSC also plans to ask voters at Town Meeting to switch the position of treasurer/collector from an elected position to an appointed position.

Sharon's Open Town Meeting has come under fire recently for its low attendance. The proposal at last December's Special Town Meeting to sell the Sacred Heart property was decided by a mere 350 total voters.

There were 8,594 registered voters out of 15,520 residents in Sharon according to voter rolls in December. Critics claim small special interest groups can control town business with such a low voter turnout.

In April, 1984, the Cannon Forge commercial and condominium development issue mobilized large factions in town as 1,883 voters came to the first night of Town Meeting. With the question defeated, the next two nights drew 253 and

151 voters, respectively. When Cannon Forge came up again at Special Town Meeting in December of that year, 1,491 voters attended. With the question defeated again, only 133 voters came to the second session to finish the town's business.

Still, there are arguments against the Representative Town Meeting structure.

"People perceive it as taking away a right that they now have," said Anne Carney, co-chair of the GSC.

Carney said the committee has heard from many residents on the issue, and support runs about even for each of the forms of Town Meeting.

"My first thought was that representative Town Meeting would solve the problem (of attendance)," said Allen Garf, who chairs the GSC with Carney. "Now, the more I know about it, I'm back in the middle somewhere."

The GSC, formed at last spring's Town Meeting, must hold four public forums before presenting its report to Town Meeting this year. Two forums were held in the fall, and the next will be held in early February.

The committee will present information about the

two Town Meeting structures, but it will remain neutral on the issue. Carney said she said putting the question on the election ballot should get a response from about 2,000 voters who turn out to elect town officers.

"That would be a good sampling," she said.

The Warrant question planned for Annual Town Meeting debate will propose removing the position of town treasurer/collector from the election ballot and making it an appointed position.

After studying the question, the committee concluded that leaving a critical financial position like town treasurer to the capriciousness of a vote puts the town at risk.

We could get an unqualified unbondable person in that office," said Garf. "The level of risk is huge." Carney agreed.

Even if we don't get that change on the Warrant it will be in our report that we recommend it," said Carney.

Sharon has no charter and no provision for recall.

ing an elected official, said committee member Judith Katz. She said if an individual was elected who could not be bonded to perform financial duties, the town would be stuck.

She suggested that, if the Government Study Committee continues to sit next year, it might study the charter issue. Sharon now has a set of by-laws.

The Committee will meet again on Thursday, Jan. 28, to plan the next public forum.

Sharon Advocate,
January 21, 1988,
p. 6

Insurers to co under new law

Massachusetts now will require that medical insurers cover certain life-saving food supports for individuals with ileitis or ulcerative colitis under a new law sponsored by State Sen. William R. Keating (D-Sharon).

The law would require that private insurers provide payment for enteral food products which do not contain medical ingredients.

"The use of these prod-

IBM COMPATIBLE

640K, 10 meg, all business software,
color monitor Preiferses 3000 Will

Sharon Advocate

F

Group looks into Representative TM

by Pat Goudey

Another Town Meeting is approaching, and the Government Study Committee (GSC) wants to find out how many voters really care.

If all goes as planned, a non-binding referendum question will appear on the election ballot this May, a week before voters meet in the high school auditorium to decide the town's business for another year. The question will ask voters to choose between Sharon's present form of Open Town Meeting and the alternative, Representative Town Meeting.

The GSC wants to find out how many people prefer to go to town meeting and vote on warrant articles, and how many would prefer to have elected representatives go and vote for them.

Stoughton Selectman Roy Cohen spoke to the GSC last Thursday about his view of Representative Town Meeting in Stoughton, which adopted the form in

the early 1950s.

"I think it is better. What you get is a cross interest," Cohen said. "You get a diverse opinion voting on issues. It's a miniature of what you have at the state and national level, when you look at it."

Minority rules?

The Open Town Meeting model has been criticized here lately because some recent sessions have drawn fewer than 5% of the town's registered voters to decide important financial matters for the whole town.

The Sacred Heart Dormitory sale, a land use article with important recreational and environmental overtones, was defeated at last December's Special Town Meeting for lack of 22 votes. Sharon has an electorate of more than 8,500 voters. The GSC said criticism is aimed not at the result of December's vote, but at the small number of people who could decide such a critical issue for the town.

Representative Town Meeting, as opposed to Open

Town Meeting, allows only elected members from each voting precinct to vote on Town Meeting floor. While residents are welcome to attend Town Meeting and discuss the issues, they cannot vote on warrant articles.

In Stoughton, with 168 representatives, a quorum of 100 members must be present for Town Meeting to convene, Cohen said.

"At no time can you get a group of people who come in and vote on an issue and cause it to be, in effect. You get a cross representation to show up at each Town Meeting," he said.

Government Study Committee member Judith Katz asked what aspects of representative Town Meeting do not work so well, and Cohen said he couldn't think of any.

"The system is good," he said.

Reps do their homework

He added that representatives who attend Town Meeting usually have done their homework and know

the issues.

"If they're going to run, they're going to be interested," he pointed out. "You're building on an interested nucleus."

The committee as a whole has remained neutral on the issue and will not present a recommendation for the spring election. Still, each member expressed a leaning in one direction or another.

"At one time it bothered me that the (open) meetings could be packed, especially if I didn't like the decision," said Lee Barron Wernick, running for selectman this spring. "As it turns out, they're usually right, in the long run. And, thinking about it, we don't want to frustrate people's enthusiasm to participate."

Allen Garf, also running for selectman this spring, said he is uncertain which form of Town Meeting he would choose, but tilts slightly toward representative town meeting to alleviate Sharon's attendance problems.

Sharon Advocate,
February 4, 1988,
p. 3

Election results

Sharon Advocate,
May 5, 1988,
p. 1

Question #4

Non-binding advisory. Shall the town change
from open town meeting to representative town
meeting?

YES 1078

NO 3300

BLANKS 167

Those first few Articles on Monday went very quickly...

by Pat Goudey

Voters made short work of the first 13 articles they took up Monday night, including approval of town budgets, with no hint of the controversy that raged before last week's elections and the \$900,000 Proposition 2½ override.

They approved raising the minimum yearly teachers' salary to \$20,000 after some murmuring in the ranks but no objections. The minimum salary for this year was \$17,702.

For the first two years starting next year, the State will make up the shortfall between the Town's contractual minimum and the new limit, according to Superintendent of Schools John F. Maloney. In Fiscal Year 1991, the Town will pick up the total cost.

By the current teachers' contract, Sharon's minimum pay next year for a teacher with bachelor's degree in the first year of teaching would have been \$18,764. It would have risen to and \$19,890 by 1990. As of last December, Sharon had three teachers earning minimum salary. Dr. Maloney said about 10 teachers earn less than \$20,000 under the current contract.

It will be an appointed treasurer

The voters apparently agreed that the position of tax collector/treasurer is too complex and critical to the Town's welfare to

depend on qualified candidates being elected to the job. Town Meeting went along with a recommendation by the Government Study Committee to have the Treasurer-Collector appointed by Selectmen rather than elected at Annual Town Election.

Assessor money goes in Reserve Fund

There's been some grumbling around Town about a projected \$30,000 cost of additional help for the assessors as they gear up to reassess all Town properties. Extra costs were anticipated because assistant assessor Robert Kubera resigned this year.

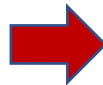
Voters went along with a recommendation of the Warrant Committee not to appropriate the money for assessments but to put it in the Reserve Fund and let the assessors draw on it if and when it is needed.

Town's insurance share for employees jumps

After Monday's vote, Sharon now will pick up 60% of the cost of medical insurance for its employees and retired employees. The increase brings the Town up to a negotiated level arrived at last year.

Last week, Selectmen said many towns pay 75% or more toward their employees health insurance. Mansfield pays 80%, Foxboro and Stoughton pay 75%, and Canton offers dental insurance, Selectmen said.

Sharon Advocate,
May 5, 1988,
p. 12



Study committee will examine Board of Health appointments

By PAUL HILL
SENTINEL Correspondent

SHARON — The Board of Selectmen voted last week to recommend that the Town Government Study Committee examine the controversial issue of an appointed Board of Health, to replace the current practice, in which the Selectmen serve as the health board.

A petition article will appear in the annual town meeting warrant calling for the appointment of a five-member Board of Health, with three members to be named by the Selectmen, and two to be named by the Planning Board.

The petition article, submitted by Richard Kramer, of Beach Street, has caused a mild furor about town, as Selectmen and other town officials are making no secret of the fact that they oppose the article, because they feel it would politicize the appointment process.

Prior to the regular Selectmen's meeting, Kramer conferred informally with the board, and indicated he is agreeable to amending the article to have all five members appointed by the Selectmen.

But that change did nothing to

soften the Selectmen's opposition, which basically takes the form of "if the current system isn't broken, don't fix it."

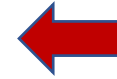
During the board's regular session, Selectman Allen Garf suggested that the Government Study Committee might be a helpful vehicle to examine the entire issue.

Garf also suggested a review by the Public Health Advisory Board, which is composed primarily of engineers and medical professionals, who advise the Selectmen on Board of Health matters.

Selectman Chairman Michael Cook noted, "I really can't see why there is such a great rush here to change the present system. We should take our time to study a change of this magnitude, and the Government Study Committee's input on this question could prove very helpful to all of us."

It was at this point that Selectman Norman Katz offered the motion to recommend that the Government Study Committee examine the Board of Health issue and all its ramifications, and report back to the Selectmen at their convenience.

The motion was passed unanimously.



Sharon Sentinel,
March 29, 1989,
p. 1

Should board maintain powers?

Town mulls separate Board of Health

by Pat Goudey

Should the Town continue using the Board of Selectmen for its Board of Health, or should an appointed Board of Health be instituted?

Selectmen last week decided the question is one for the Government Study Committee to research and make a recommendation even if a decision cannot be made in time for Town Meeting in May.

Beach Street resident Richard Kramer, a volunteer on the Lake Management Study Committee and the Sacred Heart Building Committee, disagrees. In February, Mr. Kramer submitted an article for the May Town Meeting Warrant calling for an appointed Board of Health. The Board of Selectmen now fills that slot, with Town Executive Secretary Benjamin E. Puritz as

health agent.

An Advisory Board of Health meets periodically to study public health issues and offer reports and advice to Selectmen. Advisory Board Chairman Stanley Rosen was not enthusiastic about changing the structure of the current board, telling the Warrant Committee last week, if it isn't broken, don't fix it.

Last Thursday, Selectmen voted to ask the Government Study Committee for a review and recommendation on the issue.

"I think that's the appropriate place," said Selectman Allen Garf. "And also to ask the Advisory Board of Health for input. They (the Government Study Committee) can seek testimony from elements of the Town and across the State."

Selectmen did not ask to have the report in hand before Town Meeting.

"I would assume we'd have Town Meetings in the future," said Selectman Norman Katz who made the motion to ask for a report "whenever it is completed."

"I don't expect an issue like that to be done in a hurry," Selectman Chairman Michael Cook said later. "It's time consuming and I don't think it can be rushed if they're going to do a good job."

Mr. Kramer said if the Government Study Committee report is not completed by Town Meeting, he will press for a vote on his article anyway.

"I've been discussing with members of the Government Study Committee for the past two years the issue of a separate Board of Health," he said Tuesday. "They've not considered it a priority item. I'm glad they're finally interested, (but) I'm not prepared to wait around for another year."

He said an appointed Board of Health would be less political and would have more time to deliberate issues that come before it than the Selectmen have acting as a Board of Health.

"I think we do need a separate Board of Health so that we can have professional quality people on the front line with

some actual authority to deal with health issues," he said. "The Selectmen simply do not have sufficient time to act as a fully involved Board of Health."

"In many towns of similar size (to Sharon), the Board of Health is the second busiest board in town. We're being short-changed."

He said the Advisory Board of Health contains competent professionals who could remain on an advisory board or they could apply for appointment to the Board of Health.

"They're in the bullpen (now)," he said. "Take them out of the bullpen and put them in the game."

Two weeks ago, Selectmen told Mr. Kramer that his article was incorrectly drawn to allow a legally appointed Board of Health, but they recanted, determining it is legal. Mr. Kramer has agreed to combine his article with a home rule petition to the State to allow the changeover.

"That's just a technicality," he stated.

He also agreed to drop the Planning Board as one of the ap-

pointing agencies if that would garner the Selectmen's support at Town Meeting. Selectmen would be the sole appointing authority under the revised article, he said, but if they don't lend their support, he will ask voters to approve a five member Board of Health with two members appointed by the Planning Board and three by Selectmen. He included the Planning Board because he said they deal with building and development issues relevant to Board of Health deliberations.

Discussing the possible costs of a changeover, Mr. Kramer claims there would be none to speak of because a health agent, public health nurse and sanitarian already are funded. The appointed board would function much as the Conservation Commission or the Zoning Board of Appeals, two other appointed boards with broad legal authority.

"There is nothing innate about changing the Board of Health members that would affect cost one way or another," Mr. Kramer maintained.

Sharon Advocate,
March 29, 1989,
p. 8

1990-1996

•**Article 5:** Approval would reinstitute an independent Government Study Committee along the lines initially approved at 1987 Town Meeting. That group fulfilled its original charter and was disbanded after voters accepted its recommendation to switch from an elected Town treasurer to an appointed treasurer. The original group also studied open town meeting versus representative town meeting and recommended continuing with the Town's current one person-one vote system.

Selectmen last year appointed a temporary **Government Study** group to review several issues referred by Town boards and by voters at Town Meetings, promising to seek creation of a non-political group at the next Town Meeting. If approved, the Committee will include members appointed by the Selectmen, the Planning Board, the School Committee, the Personnel Board, the Warrant Committee and the Town Moderator.

Selectmen and the Warrant Committee unanimously support Article 5.

Sharon Advocate,
November 15, 1990,
p. 10

Five-member board of selectmen proposed

By Jennifer Lancione

STAFF WRITER

Are five selectmen better than three?

Residents will have the chance to decide at special town meeting on Feb. 12. Edward Ruvich of East Street, who submitted the petition, feels two more selectmen would indeed strengthen the board.

"With five selectmen there is the opportunity for more discussion and more ideas," Ruvich said at this week's finance committee meeting. "A 2-1 vote can end a discussion that should be discussed more. I think a 3-2 vote is better."

The finance committee argued if a member of the board of selectmen cannot stand up for his or her view and start a discussion, that person should be voted out of office.

"Two more selectmen would be a radical change for this town," fincom member Colleen Tuck said. "I don't buy into the theory that five is better than three."

At the end of Wednesday's meeting, the finance committee recommended approval of five selectmen by a 5-4 vote. Members initially recommended a government study on the matter.

Ruvich said he believes five selectmen would open the field for more representation.

"We have a diverse population in Sharon. Some people have expressed they don't feel represented."

He also said having two selectmen up for re-election each year would be beneficial.

"More people would run, and more ideas would come out."

Ruvich cited Norton, Stoughton, Norwood, Easton, Carver and Mansfield as only some of the surrounding towns that have five selectmen. Canton, a bordering town, has a three-member board.

"It's time to join the 20th century," he said. "We are behind the times with three. Most towns have five."

"There wouldn't be any real extra cost down the line."

The committee argued that some towns, like Easton, have had five selectmen for over 20 years.

The finance committee then asked the population of some of the other towns, wondering if there was a relation to the number of selectmen.

"It varies," Ruvich said. "Carver has a population of only 6,000. Most are in Sharon's ballpark."

Sharon Advocate,
January 26, 1996,
p. 3

Number of selectmen still could change

By Jennifer Lancione
STAFF WRITER

Voters rejected increasing the number of selectmen from three to five at Monday's town meeting, but they will have a chance to reconsider.

Edward Ruvich of East Street placed the issue on the warrant for the annual town meeting in May by petition well before this week's special town meeting was called. He said he put it on this week's warrant too "when it came up."

"My original goal was to put this on the warrant in May," Ruvich said Tuesday. "May is fine for me. I think this is an important thing, but there's no real rush."

On Monday, the article was defeated by a 320-172 vote.

However, discussion at the meeting Monday indicated that many townspeople voted against making a quick change and are not necessarily opposed to the proposed increase.

Time to think

"I think a lot of people felt they didn't have enough time to think about it," Ruvich said. "I didn't even have time to prepare."

Helene Bednarsh, vice president of the Sharon-Stoughton League of Women Voters said at Monday's meeting, "We think more time is needed to study this."

Myron Kaufmann of Pond Street added, "If it ain't broke, the least we can do is think about it twice. This should not be voted on a whim, at night, at a special town meeting."

Before the annual town meeting, the proposed increase will be reviewed in depth by the town's Government Study Committee. Chairman Lee Barron Wernick said the issue was to be addressed as early as this week.

"I don't know how the committee will go, but I'm trying to get it rolling," he said.

Wernick, who is also chairman of the finance committee, said he would also bring the board of health debate to the Government Study Committee's attention. (See Page 2.)

Ruvich made a presentation on his proposed increase at town meeting Monday night, telling voters that "five is the right number."

"The selectmen have proven this by their insistence of having a five member board of health," Ruvich said in reference to the earlier discussion of the board of health articles.

Most surrounding towns, including Mansfield, Walpole, Norwood and Easton, have five selectmen, he added.

Ruvich, who ran for selectmen in 1990, said he feels more ideas, discussions and productivity would come from five members. "With

See **Selectmen**, page 2

Sharon Advocate,
February 16, 1996,
p. 1

Study will bring out more opinions

Selectmen, from page 1

three selectmen there's the chance one dominant member will sway the vote," he told town meeting.

Kaufmann disagreed. "Anyone in town can go to town meeting to express ideas. On Thursdays people can go to selectmen meetings and tell them what they think."

Leonard Segal of Lyndon Road supported Ruvich's article. "Life is more complicated now. There's more regulations. It's getting harder and harder for a board of three people."

While Ruvich argued that a board of five selectmen would provide a better 3-2 vote, others argued there's more politics involved with five than with three.

"With five you have a rigid split between three and two. Politiking sets in," Kaufmann said. "With

each member elected to a three-year term, three people get to be chairman while two do not. Those three people stick together."

"If the (five selectmen) all do their job, they'll be there for more than one term, and everyone will get to be chairman," countered Segal.

In his presentation Ruvich noted the finance committee recommended the increase from three to five.

"The finance committee doesn't recommend anything that isn't beneficial to the town," he said.

Two weeks ago, the finance committee recommended the article by a 5-4 vote. The majority said five members would provide an opportunity for more opinions. The minority felt the issue should go to the Government Study Committee first.

2001-2006

Format change mulled for TM

By Peter Hartzel
STAFF WRITER

The length and procedural difficulties of the Nov. 13 Special Town Meeting have raised the possibility that Sharon may change its meeting format from open town meeting to representative town meeting.

While any changes remain in the realm of the hypothetical for now, the Government Study Committee may reexamine the town's meeting structure and consider changes in the coming months, Town Administrator Ben Puritz said at the Nov. 30 Selectmen's meeting.

The board discussed the issue briefly at the meeting, and the three Selectmen sounded open to the possibility of some changes to the meeting's parliamentary procedure, though none was immediately willing to endorse a change to a representative meeting format.

But Selectmen Chairman Norman Katz said the town's growth will make a change to representative meeting inevitable in the long term.

"The town is going to get so big that an open town meeting can't accommodate everyone that wants to go," Katz told the Advocate this week.

"We saw the difficulty that we had at the meeting," he said. "Eventually, if we cannot accommodate all the people who want to attend, we're going to have to change to representative town meeting. Where would people go? You can't have the Sharon town meeting at Foxboro Stadium."

Sharon Advocate,
December 8, 2000,
p. 1

Town meeting format, procedures under consideration

TOWN MEETINGS, from page 1

The recent Special Town Meeting was scheduled for Nov. 13, but the pace of the meeting was so slow that two additional sessions, on Nov. 14 and Nov. 21, were required to complete business on each of the 27 articles on the warrant. Just five articles were voted on during the combined seven-plus hours of the meeting's first two nights.

The glacial pace was attributed to the large turnout. Due to the unusually high level of interest in the first two articles on the warrant, which concerned the acquisition of the Rattlesnake Hill and King Philip's Rock properties for open space and a proposed by-law for the Rattlesnake Hill parcel, two extra halls were needed to accommodate the overflow crowd.

The school auditorium was filled well before the meeting's 8 p.m. start, necessitating use of the gymnasium and cafeteria. Moderator George Donavon presided over the auditorium crowd while two moderators were present in the other rooms, which were linked to the auditorium by video feed on big screen televisions in each location.

Katz said not having all the voters in one location caused the focus and pace of the meeting to suffer.

"When we aren't able to handle

the number of people who want to participate, it loses some of its continuity," Katz said.

Some residents became disgruntled with the length of the meeting, especially when extended discussion took place regarding projects that seemed certain to gain approval, such as the senior center.

The Government Study Committee, an eight-member panel whose members are appointed by the town's Board of Selectmen, Town Meeting Moderator, the Personnel Board, the Finance Committee and the Planning Board, has not met in eight years. The committee will examine the need for changes to the format and rules of town meetings in Sharon and research how other towns have gone about enacting such changes.

If the town decides that a change to representative town meeting is needed, there are two ways to do it. The town may form a Charter Commission to make the change, which Puritz said would lead to "a multi-step, multi-year process" before a change could be effected. The quicker route would be to petition the state legislature to pass an act approving the change.

Sharon has held open town meetings since the town was incorporated

"Eventually, if we cannot accommodate all the people who want to attend, we're going to have to change to representative town meeting. Where would people go? You can't have the Sharon town meeting at Foxboro Stadium."

Norman Katz
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF
SELECTMEN

in 1765. Puritz said residents should know that "it doesn't mean that that's the way it has to be now, or forever," but he added that there are strong arguments for both formats, an open meeting and a representative meeting.

"It may be that a change is needed. It is arguable on both sides," Puritz said. "The open town meeting is based on the Athenian model of citizen legislator, and it's known as the purest form of democracy."

Katz noted that a substantial amount of time at the recent Special Town Meeting was spent on procedural matters. In one instance, a vote taken on a motion to close off debate on an article lasted 45 minutes. It wasn't a vote on whether to approve an article; it was essentially a vote on whether to take a vote.

Selectman Allen M. Garf said the town may want to consider time lim-

its for debate on each article. Selectman Walter Joe Rosch spoke of a town meeting rule used in Canton under which the articles are distributed and voted on in random sequence.

Rosch said if voters don't know when articles are going to be voted on, they'll attend the whole evening instead of segments. Such a rule would prevent the fate of less publicized articles from being determined by small groups of voters, he added.

In the recent Special Town Meeting, the major articles were sequenced at the top of the warrant, meaning that about 1,500 residents were on hand on the first night of the meeting to vote on the land acquisitions and the senior center. Smaller groups of residents attended the next two sessions, and just over a hundred people were present to vote on later articles. Canton officials said their town meetings were plagued by the same problem until they adopted random sequencing five years.

"It has worked very well," said Tracy Kenny, Canton's acting Town Clerk, who said the town used a lottery-style selection process by picking enumerated ping-pong balls from a bingo machine. "People used to get up and leave after voting on one article that they were interested in. That doesn't happen anymore."

Canton Selectmen Avril Elkort agreed, saying "I think it has been an improvement."

As for a change to representative town meeting, a change may be inevitable, Katz said, but it will probably not happen in the near future, and definitely won't happen if residents are opposed.

"We're going to look at it for the good of the community. This will be a slow process, if it occurs at all," Katz said. "If the people don't want this, it will not happen."

HouseCalls
...By Larry
The Small Job Specialist • Fully Insured
* Quality Home Maintenance * All Types of Jobs *
Custom Shades and Blinds
784-2458

Meeting a success, but some changes needed

The recent Special Town Meeting gave residents an opportunity to make their opinions known in a forum frequently called the purest form of democracy. Decisions were made, funds were appropriated, and along the way some voters became disgruntled with the process. Some left satisfied, and others less so, but overall the meeting proved once again that democracy is sometimes messy, but it works.

Nevertheless, we feel certain improvements could be made to make town meetings in Sharon more responsive to residents' needs. At the meeting, a substantial amount of time was spent on procedural matters. For instance, a vote taken on a motion to close off debate on an article lasted 45 minutes. That wasn't even a vote on whether to approve an article; it was essentially a vote on whether to take a vote. It would make sense to use such time for discussion.

Selectman Allen M. Garf raised a good point at the board's Nov. 30 meeting, saying that the town may want to consider time limits for debate on each article. There's no good reason that a town meeting should last three days and nearly 12 hours. While it's understandable that many residents want to have their say on important issues affecting the town, there must be a way to accommodate a range of viewpoints that also respects the busy lives of residents. Most cannot devote three nights to town meeting attendance, nor should they be expected to. A town meeting should really be an end to the decision-making process, not a beginning. Residents could improve the situation by learning about the issues at stake before the meeting, not once they get there.

The long-dormant **Government Study** Committee, an eight-member panel appointed by several town boards, plans to review the town's meeting format and rules in the coming months. They may even consider moving to a representative town meeting. Many residents have an automatic reaction against such a change, which might compromise the esteemed "one man, one vote" standard currently in use. But they need not worry, because the process of enacting changes to town meeting will probably be a lengthy one, if it occurs at all, and no major change will occur without a passage of a referendum voted on by the town's residents.

When the **Government Study** Committee makes its recommendation to Selectmen about the future of town meetings in Sharon, it should seek, above all else, to streamline the process. That may include adopting a clear set of parliamentary procedures such as Robert's Rules, which would help the town balance its need for open discourse with its need for a meeting of reasonable length. Our town officials have served us effectively in the past; we call on the **Government Study** Committee to bring about progress on this important matter.

Sharon Advocate,
December 15, 2000
p. 13 (Editorial)

Government Study Committee continues its deliberations

Continuing in its quest for input from elected Town boards, the Government Study Committee on Oct. 11 listened to the opinions of the School Committee about possible changes in town government.

Prominent issues occupying the Government Study Committee are whether Town Meeting should be open or representative, whether the order of the annual TM and election should be reversed, and whether TM articles should be taken up in "lottery" order.

At present, all registered voters may attend open Town Meeting. Under representative TM, only 150-200 representatives elected from Sharon's five precincts would attend TM and vote on the articles, according to Government Study member George Bailey. "It's easier to call and arrange for a representative Town Meeting," said Bailey. "Having elected delegates represent your views is better than the present default, where 200 or so voters stay till the end and make [some] decisions for all." Anne Carney, Government Study chairman, said she is "realistic" and would not be inclined to recommend a representative TM unless there is "a significant desire for it in the community." "I'm quixotic," Bailey countered, "and believe our committee should determine the best solution and propose

it. [If voters reject it,] there is no downside to losing." Member Pat Zlotin will research how other towns, large and small, handle this issue as well as the order of TM and election.

Mitch Blaustein, School Committee chairman, said the School Committee was satisfied with the status quo on open TM and a known (rather than lottery-like) order of taking up TM articles, although he agreed that having the scheduled annual election follow Town Meeting, rather than precede it as now, would be beneficial in terms of applying for grants. Government Study member Len Segal also favored having annual TM before the election rather than after. "You have newly elected Selectmen or Planning Board members who may not be completely familiar with the issues when they attend Town Meeting," he said. Others felt having Town Meeting before the election would provide voters with more information before going to the polls.

At its third meeting, on August 20, Government Study heard from George Donovan, the TM Moderator. He commented that in general Sharon governs itself well compared to other communities. Asked about attendance and the need for having a TM quorum requirement, he said, "There is no particular value in wor-

rying about attendance. If some people [by choosing not to be there] want others to represent them, that is their choice." On the question of whether discussion of pros and cons should be time-limited—an idea espoused by Selectman Allen Garf at a previous meeting—Donovan said his way of conducting TM is to make attendees feel they have been treated fairly. If this means extended discussion (including organized presentations), "then that's the way it has to be."

Limiting TM nights per week, and changing the time of TM from 8 p.m. to 7 or 7:30 p.m.—which would require a Town bylaw change—were also discussed. Attendance at the May 2001 Town Meeting, which ran unusually long—four nights during one week—was 764, 504, 234, and 96, on respective nights.

The Government Study Committee, reactivated in 2000 after lapsing in 1987 and 1990, is composed of eight members—two designated by the Selectmen (Carney, Zlotin), two by the Finance Committee (Dave Fixler, David Hearne), and one each by the Moderator (Bailey), the Planning Board (Segal), the School Committee (Mike Schachter), and the Personnel Board (Dennis Friedman). Its next meeting is planned for Wednesday November 14. All meetings are open to the public.

Sharon Advocate,
October 19, 2001,
p. 3

Should Sharon switch from three to a five-member board of selectmen?

By Peter Hartzel
STAFF WRITER

Are three-member Boards of Selectmen going the way of the dinosaur? Another one bit the dust last month.

In May, Town Meeting in neighboring Canton voted to expand the town's Board of Selectmen from three to five members. With that move to join Stoughton, Easton and Mansfield in the five-member club, Foxboro remains the only town abutting Sharon that still has a three-member board.

A few residents say it might be time for a change.

"Five is more democratic, more representative of a growing town," said Frank Nagle. "When you look at three, the image is that it's a private club. It seems that who gets in is who has the connections to groups in town."

However, there appears to little interest in such a change among members of the Government Study Committee, an appointed panel that is charged with reviewing the town's government structure and, potentially, recommending changes.

"My conclusion is that the five-member Board of Selectmen form is no improvement," said George Bailey, a Government Study Committee member. "It would be more people to vote for, but not necessarily better government. It's a cosmetic change that produces no particular benefit."

Bailey added that it would be "a waste of the town's time" for the Government Study Committee to look into the matter, saying there are "a lot more substantive issues" at hand, including the question of whether to continue using an open Town Meeting or change to some other format, such as representative Town Meeting or Town Council.

The issue came up mostly recently at a special Town Meeting in February 2000, but failed. Resident Ed Ruvich, who drafted the article, attributed the outcome to the timing of the vote near the end of the warrant un-

changed. Most towns move toward expanding their board of selectmen because of population growth. Some communities have looked to a larger board as a way to have one selectman from each precinct, or as a means of satisfying other representation issues.

For some towns, the switch was a triggered by broad social and cultural trends. In Easton, according to Hardin, the town's switch from a three- to a five-member board was the product of that decade's nascent women's rights movement.

"This was a way of accommodating a growing trend in the country. There were three popular members and a popular woman who wanted to be a selectman, so the best way was to change the charter so everybody was happy," said Hardin, a selectman for 15 years.

Sharon selectmen Chairman Walter "Joe" Roach said he doesn't see a change happening anytime soon, but he believes the possibility "has some pros and cons to it."

"With three people, you don't get bogged ass much. We can agree to disagree and still move on, but five people gives you more points of view," said Roach, adding that if a movement forms to push for expanding the board, he would survey town officials in other communities with five-member boards to gauge the effectiveness of having five selectmen.

Roach cited his board's 2-1 vote last on the white-hot Rattlesnake Hill acquisition (Selectman Norman Katz cast the lone vote recommending that the town buy the land for \$12 million) as evidence that three-member boards do not lack for principled opposition.

Asked for his opinion on whether Sharon would benefit from changing to a five-member board, Town Administrator Ben Puntz said it would be inappropriate for him to comment because "too close to the issue."

Proponents of five-member boards argue that makes it's easier to get things done with more people among whom work can be divided. But even though Sharon is a municipality nearly the size of neighboring towns, Roach said he doesn't feel his board is particularly burdened.

"The budget process is phased out over the year so it's not really a hustle-bustle (situation)," Roach said.

On the flip side, five-member boards seem more likely to divide into factions and generate rancor. The latter dynamic was illustrated dramatically last fall in Easton, where the Board of Selectmen chaired by Fred Clark (father of Fred Clark, Jr., the longtime Joe Moakley aide being mentioned as a possible candidate for the late Moakley's Congressional seat) voted 3-2 not to renew the contract of the town's longtime town administrator, Kevin Paicos.

Then Paicos' supporters mobilized to ouster Clark in a special recall election. They succeeded, and the new selectman, sympathetic to Paicos, caused board support for the town administrator to flip from 3-2 against him to 3-2 for him, paving the way for Paicos return. The process put the town in turmoil for months and is a rather extreme example of the divisions that can develop on five-member boards, but an illuminating one nonetheless.

Still, there are those who believe the benefits of a five-member Board of Selectmen far outweigh the potential liabilities.

"Issues are talked about more in depth, rather than it's rubber-stamped," Nagle said. "One some issues, it could be more cloudy than clear, but if you look at how this country was built, that was the case then. You can have a clique run everything, but hopefully this is America and we can have different points of view. The town is growing and getting more complex; we should move into the twentieth-first century and get a five-member panel."

Sharon Advocate,
June 22, 2001,
p. 5

Government Study Committee meets

The recently revived Government Study Committee, first established 14 years ago to study the structure of town government and the duties of existing town officers, held its second meeting Wednesday.

Five of the eight-member board were present: Chairman Anne Carney, Pat Zlotin, Len Segal, George Bailey, and Mike Schachter. Other members include Dave Fixler and David Hearne.

The Committee first drew up a list of topics it might consider. Among them were whether Town Meeting format needs improvement, and how * Should open Town Meeting (where each citizen can go and vote) be changed to a representative Town Meeting or Town Council?

If open Town Meeting is kept, should the order of articles be chosen as in a lottery? Should written rules like Robert's Rules of Order be adopted? Should a quorum of voters be required to conduct business? Should speakers be time-limited?

Should the timing of elections, now usually held before Town Meetings, be changed? The Committee was formed in 1987 and again in 1990, and was reactivated this year.

The 1988 Town Report states, "The Government Study Commit-

tee reviewed the results of the non-binding referendum question it placed on the May 3, 1988, Annual Town Election Ballot. This question had asked the voters, Shall the Town change its form of Town Meeting from an Open Meeting to a Representative Town Meeting? The results were 1,078 to 3,300 in favor of retaining the present Open Meeting form of government. Based on the overwhelming response to retain the current form of Town Meeting, the Committee will not pursue this question any further."

How to give voters better information about Town Meeting articles and election ballot questions was an important concern to all committee members. It is difficult for the town to distribute publicity about ballot questions as the state does, for instance, since to avoid any fines town statements about the ballot questions must be strictly informational and not in any way pro or con. Also problematical is the inability of the Finance Committee to make recommendations in the warrant on all articles because it gets information from boards too late.

Bailey suggested Town Report (and possibly a Web site) should contain better budgetary information on

assets, liabilities, and funds distribution so that voters could draw conclusions for themselves. A federal requirement for a comprehensive town audit by 2003 might help gather such information, but Segal pointed out that amounts under \$15,000 are not required to be listed in that audit.

Schachter emphasized public outreach through a survey asking for citizen opinions, and said some Committee meetings should be held at the high school to make young voters aware of government issues. To assist in its deliberations, the committee will request opinions from the moderator and town boards—and later from the public—as to what government functions need improvement.

Asked whether townspeople could suggest topics for the committee to consider, Carney said, "Yes, but the committee will prioritize which issues it wants to consider first." Also, if there were no signs of an urgent desire for change or "massive problems with" existing government formats like Town Meeting, the Committee might not go on to consider them, Carney said.

Bailey disagreed, saying that the Committee should lead—gather information, consider all relevant questions, and make recommendations.

Sharon Advocate,
June 29, 2001,
p. 2

Government Study Committee meets

By Alice Cheyer
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

The Government Study Committee began gathering opinions from town boards about what government functions need improvement by inviting Selectmen Walter "Joe" Roach and Allen Garf and Town Administrator Ben Puritz to its meeting on Wednesday. Several members of the public also attended.

The committee should study whether always to have Town Meeting (TM) first with an election following (contrary to the present norm), which might result in monetary savings and getting better information to voters before they cast ballots, Selectmen suggested.

Also discussed were possible changes in the town meeting process, such as scrambling the order of warrant articles, time limits for debate on each article or for individual

speakers, pro/con microphones, adopting Robert's Rules of Order, counting votes by paper chits, improving the overhead displays, sending out flyers to the public about TM procedures, holding TM earlier (at 7 p.m.), and continuing not more than two evenings per week.

Committee members also talked briefly about whether a charter has any benefits over the present town bylaw system (consensus: it doesn't) and whether a representative TM or a town council was appropriate for Sharon's size. TM procedures should be streamlined, audience member Sam Liao said, but changing from open TM, which every voter can attend, to representative TM might diminish citizens' interest in town issues.

A vexing question was how to get better information to the public. To get around legal restrictions that

prevent government officials from taking positions on elections, committee member Len Segal proposed, the private League of Women Voters could distribute pro and con circulars. The town Web site, prepared by high school students, should open later this year, said Puritz, and facts on government and voting issues could be posted there, or on an information kiosk being considered for Post Office Square.

Committee member Mike Schachter spoke about a survey he was preparing to get public input. The other committee members are Chairman Anne Carney, George Bailey, Dennis Friedman, Dave Fixler, David Hearne, and Pat Zlotin.

A notice of the next meeting date, possibly August 20, will be posted in advance at Town Hall. All meetings are open to the public.

Sharon Advocate,
July 20, 2001,
p. 2

Government Study Committee's work near end

After the November 2000 Town Meeting the Sharon Board of Selectmen reconstituted the Government Study Committee - a Committee originally established pursuant to a November, 1991, Town Meeting vote. The Committee is charged to examine the governmental structure of Sharon and submit findings and recommendations to the Town.

The reconstituted Committee conducted its first meeting in April of 2001 and has met monthly thereafter. During these meetings, the Committee interviewed elected town officials, members of many town boards, members of the School Committee, the superintendent of Schools, the town administrator and the town moderator. The committee also interviewed a retired town administrator from Brookline (a community with a Representative Town Meeting form of government) and the town administrator from Franklin (a community with a council form of government). As a result of these meetings the Committee has received valuable information that it

will utilize as it begins to formulate its recommendations on ways to improve Sharon's governmental structure.

In preparation for conducting public forums with town citizens on town governance issues, the committee has discussed over 20 ideas to improve Sharon's government. These ideas can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of ideas that attempt to improve upon Sharon's current form of government including, among others: revising the town's by-laws so that the annual election occurs after Town Meeting instead of prior to Town Meeting; introducing a lottery system for Town Meeting warrant articles (but grouping related articles together); limiting the number of consecutive nights that Town Meeting takes place; changing the starting time of Town Meetings from 8 p.m. to 7 p.m, instituting two regularly scheduled Town Meetings (spring and fall) with one meeting dealing solely with budget matters; encouraging the School Depart-

ment and the town to work more cooperatively together by entering into a memorandum of agreement regarding financial and budgetary issues; and formally adopting some rules of order for how Town Meeting is run.

All of these topics are essentially moderate changes that may make our current form of government - Board of Selectmen/Open Town Meeting- more efficient. However, at the public forums, the Committee will also be discussing a second category - whether Sharon should change its form of government.

Under Massachusetts law, there are at least three types of governmental forms that Sharon can follow: Board of Selectmen/Open Town Meeting; Board of Selectmen/Representative Town Meeting; or Town Council. While Sharon has considered a Representative Town Meeting, it has never considered a Town Council format.

According to the Massachusetts Municipal Association, 48 cities and towns in the Commonwealth utilize

the Town Council form of government. Under this form, the voters elect a Town Council in which all legislative powers of the town would be vested. Under the Town Council form Town Meetings would not occur and there would not be a Board of Selectmen. All legislation would be introduced, deliberated and voted by the Town Council.

The Committee recently held its first public forum where all of these topics were discussed. The Committee urges all interested citizens to attend and participate in these forums. The next public forum will take place on **Thursday, April 25, at 7:30 p.m.** in the Selectman's hearing room at Town Hall. Once these forums are completed and the Committee has considered the issues raised at the forums, the Committee will submit its findings and recommendations to the Town.

The Government Study Committee. Anne Carney - Chair, George Bailey, David Fixler, Dennis Friedman, David Hearne, Michael Schachter, Leonard Segal, Patricia Zlotm

Sharon Advocate,
April 19, 2002,
p. 9

Government Study Committee makes recommendations

The Government Study Committee, re-activated two years ago to review Sharon's government operations and suggest improvements, has submitted its initial recommendations to Selectmen after hearing input from the public and town boards.

The committee postponed comment on changing Sharon's Open Town Meeting form of government, as well as on a lottery sequence for taking up warrant articles, until it has completed further study. Its initial recommendations are as follows:

- Redraft the Town's bylaws so that the annual election follows the annual town meeting. This would allow town meeting discussion on overrides and debt exclusions before having to vote on them at elections.

- Begin town meeting at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m. Hold two regularly scheduled town

meetings: a spring annual town meeting, dealing mainly with budget and other "money" articles; and a fall special town meeting, dealing with Planning Board zoning issues. This might shorten each town meeting, and better inform voters ahead of time about complex zoning issues.

- Distribute a list of town meeting procedures with every warrant. Leave to the Moderator decisions on limiting debate time and on the number of consecutive evenings per week for town meeting.

- Improve public information by keeping the town's Web site up-to-date and by requesting discussion of ballot questions within a Candidate's Night (which must be privately sponsored).

- Selectmen should hold at least one joint meeting a year with all boards/committees

to encourage communication. Boards and committees should not operate in a vacuum.

- Budget discussions between Selectmen, the school community, and Finance Committee should begin as soon as revenue projections are made and continue as new revenue projections become available. A memorandum of agreement concerning revenue allocation between the schools and the town should be considered.

- All committees should be constituted and commissioned by town meeting vote. Any not currently commissioned, such as Priorities Committee, should be commissioned at the next townmeeting. All committees should have a description of purpose, appointing authority and date, members, and terms of office in the annual report.

Sharon Advocate,
December 13, 2002,
p. 3

Government Study Committee reports to Selectmen

By Richard Murphy
ROUSE NEMPT

List of recommendations aims to streamline town's government

Selectmen last week listened to Anne Carney, chairman of the Government Study Committee, present a list of recommendations from her committee for possible adoption with an eye toward streamlining the operations of local government in Sharon.

The Government Study Committee was charged to review Sharon's governmental operations and procedures and make suggestions that the committee believes "will improve the manner in which the town conducts its business."

Carney said some of the recommendations require a change of bylaw while the town moderator can institute others. The study committee arrived at the following recommendations after soliciting input from the general public and interviewing various boards and committees.

The recommendations are as follows:

- Redraft the town's bylaws so that the annual election follows the annual town meeting. This could allow the current Board of Selectmen to follow through on zoning and other articles that have been involved in. It could also allow town meeting discussion on override questions without having to vote on them.
- Hold two regularly-scheduled meetings. The first

would be the annual town meeting and would primarily deal with the budget and other money articles. The second would be held in the fall and deal with zoning and planning board issues.

This recommendation would address two of the issues the committee has had come before it. It has the potential to shorten the annual town meeting by deferring some of the more lengthy discussion to the fall, and it could also be structured so that up-to-date information regarding complex zoning and planning issues could be disseminated to the public sufficiently prior to town meeting, thereby allowing residents enough time to review the issues.

This, in turn, would afford the residents a better opportunity to make informed decisions at town meeting.

- Amend the town bylaws by changing the starting time of the annual town meeting to 7 p.m. Keep the concluding time at 11 p.m. or at the conclusion of the article under discussion at 11 p.m.
- Have a list of common procedures used at town meetings distributed with every warrant.
- Make more use of Sharon's web site to get information out

to the public. This would involve maintaining the site with the most current information available.

• Government officials should try to promote a candidate's night that would incorporate discussion of ballot questions. A group other than the town would have to host this type of forum.

• The Moderator should make decisions concerning such issues as limiting the amount of time for discussion of articles, the number of consecutive evenings for town meetings, etc.

• The selectmen should hold at least one joint meeting a year with all boards and committees to encourage communication. Boards and committees should not operate in a vacuum.

• Budget discussions between the Town Administrator, Selectmen, Superintendent of Schools, School Committee, and Finance Committee should take place as soon as revenue projections are made and should continue as new revenue projections become available.

A memorandum of agreement between the school and town concerning revenue allocation should be considered.

• All boards and committees should be constituted and com-

missioned by a vote of town meeting. Any committees, such as the Priorities Committee, not currently commissioned should be commissioned at the next town meeting.

• All committees and boards should have a description of purpose, constituting authority and date constituted in the annual report. The committee and board members, appointing authority and terms of office should also be in the annual report.

Carney concluded her presentation by promising that her committee "will continue to meet and will research in more depth the issue of changing the form of governance."

She added, "During the past year the committee has spoken with residents who want change and with others who don't. Committee membership represents both of these views, but the committee as a whole needs to do much more research before offering a recommendation on this issue."

"Another issue that is still before the committee," Carney continued, "is the question of having a lottery system to determine the sequence in which warrant articles would be taken up at town meeting. The ratio-

nale behind this idea is that residents would be less likely to come for a specific warrant article and then leave once that particular article is voted upon."

Carney said the committee's goal is to have a recommendation on both the form of governance and a lottery by the annual meeting.

Selectmen thanked Carney and her committee for a job well done and promised to follow through by giving each recommendation thorough consideration.

The members of the Government Study Committee in addition to Carney are George Bailey, David Fixler, Dennis Friedman, David Heame, Andrew Nebenzahl, Leonard Segal, and Patricia Zlotin.

Selectman Norman Katz observed, "The town still functions well. Some people are also adverse to change. But, things change and we have to be open to new ideas and new procedures. Open town meeting is the last vestige of true democracy."

Selectmen Chairman Allen Garf said, "We were the first ones around to ban smoking in the entire town."

Katz added, "Town meeting

should be more user-friendly." Carney agreed, saying, "Yes, some people feel town meeting is too archaic."

Town Administrator Ben Puritz, noting that some of these recommendations would involve town meeting articles, said he would forward the committee report to town counsel for review.

Puritz also reminded the board that Jan. 13 is the deadline to submit all petition articles.

Briefly in other business, selectmen:

• Voted to approve the executive session minutes of the Dec. 12 meeting as written.

• Voted to appoint Anne Bingham to the vacancy on the Board of Health with an expiration date of September of 2005. Also voted to appoint Janis Edinburgh to the vacant alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals position. This latter appointment will also expire in September of 2005.

• Voted to award the SERSG contract for needed drug and alcohol testing purposes for town employees to Health Services of Natick.

• Voted to accept the conservation restrictions for Lots 40 and 23 of Christina Estates.

• Agreed to hold the next regular selectmen meeting on Jan. 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Sharon Town Hall.

Sharon
Advocate,
December
27, 2002,
p. 4

Recommendations next step for Government Study Committee

The Government Study Committee, charged by Selectmen with reviewing all aspects of town government and recommending possible changes to Town Meeting, held its last formal public hearing on Aug. 1. It has been considering whether it should recommend a change in Sharon's form of government from Open Town Meeting to Representative Town Meeting or a Town Council. This change would require present Town Meeting and election approval as well as action by the state legislature.

Town Moderator Paul Bouton, present at the meeting, was asked for his views on conducting Open Town Meeting.

"I have no problem with large meetings like the last one," Bouton said. "People do have varying degrees of interest and knowledge of the issues, but I'd hate to disenfranchise anyone."

Though, he added, the logistics of registering voters before the meeting could be improved.

The pros and cons of the two-minute time limit on speakers that was in place at the May Town Meeting were discussed at length. The committee and moderator concluded that a time limit—though possibly longer than two minutes—was appropriate for encouraging concise presentations and allowing more individuals to speak, although the moderator should retain discretion to allow exceptions. It was suggested that if a speaker needed longer than the time limit, others could yield "their minutes" to him. There was also consensus that speakers' lining up at microphones rather than "waving their hands" to be recognized was an innovation that should be made permanent.

Bouton said the most common complaint he had received was about people's getting up and leaving directly after voting on "their" issue, in effect showing disrespect for the remaining issues and speakers. The second most common complaint, he

said, was that the process took too long. These seem to reflect differing views of the Town Meeting process, as did recent Advocate articles by Myron Kaufmann, who wrote that Town Meeting is a place for learning and debating information, not just for casting a vote, and by Paul Birnbaum, who wrote that voters can currently obtain information from other sources and that Town Meeting is not the ideal place to acquire it.

"Town Meeting is a weak form for community planning and prioritizing," said committee member David Hearne. Another member, George Bailey, has said that zoning issues and financial budgets are too complex to be decided in one night.

"Town Meeting is supposed to be a deliberative body," he said. "There should be discussion, amendment, and informed debate. But people who are not familiar with the issues are not capable of making good decisions."

Several audience members have said that presentations at Town Meeting, or fact sheets handed out just before it, do not inform voters adequately or in time.

But one resident, David Gordon, said, "A lot of information comes out in the talk at Town Meetings; it's educational. Open Town Meeting draws people who do care and who do come."

Another said, "Don't abdicate personal decisions to an elite—we already do that in many areas of our lives and end up speaking to voice-mail instead of human beings. More people's making decisions rather than a few is an important aspect of our society. The best things in life, like birth and buttered corn, are messy and inefficient."

"It sometimes seems that people don't want to be involved in government as long as it works," said Hearne. And chairman Anne Carney said, "It seems the question is, 'How remote from

government do you want to be?"

Determining the order of articles by a lottery (balls picked out of a drum) at the meeting would "add interest," Bouton stated, and he also favored starting Town Meeting earlier and not meeting more than two nights in one week.

"The public should know," he said, "that moderators do have access to a procedural rules book."

Other issues considered by the committee are having two regularly scheduled Town Meetings (one primarily for budgetary matters); having Town Meeting before the election, reversing the current order; and using paper yes-no chips instead of counting standing voters. Having had its required four public hearings, the committee will seek to formulate recommendations.

All meetings of the committee are open to the public, however; the next one is slated for Sept. 11 at Town Hall.

\$742 M Er Bill approv

By James Coughlin
CORRESPONDENT

On Saturday of last week, Acting Governor Jane Swift, as expected, signed the Environmental Bond Bill in the amount of \$742 million, before a small group that included Secretary of Environmental Affairs Robert Durand and Laura Johnson, the President of Massachusetts Audubon Society who lobbied heavily on behalf of the bill.

According to Doug Pizzi, spokesman for the Office of Environmental Affairs, the bill includes \$12 million for the Commonwealth to preserve

Sharon Advocate,
August 16, 2002,
p. 2

A new approach

Two years ago, the Sharon Government Study Committee came out of the mothballs.

Now it has some topics to mull.

It spent some time talking with the public and town boards, then submitted a letter to selectmen last month.

The study committee's first decisions were to hold off on the possibility of changing Sharon's Open Town Meeting and the question of taking town meeting articles by lottery sequence. Those need more thought.

But the study committee does have some ideas and ought to get fairly quick debate.

(Our editorial input is in quotes after the recommendation.)

Redraft the town's bylaws so that the annual election follows the annual town meeting (TM). This would allow TM discussion on overrides and debt exclusions before having to vote on them at elections.

(This might work well, but requires talk and everyone's understanding.)

Begin TM at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m.. Hold two regularly scheduled town meetings: a spring annual TM, dealing mainly with budget and other "money" articles; and a fall special TM, dealing with Planning Board zoning issues. This might shorten each TM, and better inform voters ahead of time about complex zoning issues.

(So long as both kinds of material can make it on either TM ballot in event of an emergency, OK.)

Distribute a list of TM procedures with every warrant. Leave to the moderator decisions on limiting debate time and on the number of consecutive evenings per week for TM.

(This depends on a good moderator and also whether the study decides the town needs a new type of TM, which it is still studying.)

Improve public information by keeping the town's Web site up-to-date and by requesting discussion of ballot questions within a Candidate's Night (which must be privately sponsored.)

(Privately sponsored is a hot-potato issue, and needs to be specified.)

Selectmen should hold at least one joint meeting a year with all boards/committees to encourage communication. Boards and committees should not operate in a vacuum.

(This should start immediately.)

Budget discussions between Selectmen, Schools, and Finance Committee should begin as soon as revenue projections are made and continue as new revenue projections become available. A memorandum of agreement concerning revenue allocation between Schools and Town should be considered.

(Schools and selectmen may see things very differently. If the two can reach agreements calmly, great. But they have the right to fight when they believe in something and have the right to have Sharon voters settle it, in the end.)

All committees should be constituted and commissioned by TM vote. Any not currently commissioned, such as Priorities Committee, should be commissioned at the next TM. All committees should have a description of purpose, appointing authority and date, members, and terms of office in the annual report.

(The question of who appoints what committee requires some study. Zoning Boards of

Appeals, for example, should not be nice people; they should be picked as quasi-judicial people. Much debate is needed here.)

Sharon Advocate,
December 20, 2002,
p. 15 (Editorial)

Government Committee continues to deliberate

The eight-member Government Study Committee, appointed by Selectmen after the November 2000 election to recommend any applicable improvements and changes to town government, held its monthly meeting on Tuesday. The six members attending reached consensus on an "A" list of changes that could be instituted within the present town government structure, and these changes will be proposed for discussion at public hearings in the next few months.

On the "A" priority list for consideration are two regularly scheduled Town Meetings (TM)—one primarily for money articles, the other primarily for zoning articles; a limit on consecutive nights for TM, some form of written rules of TM procedure; getting Planning Board articles crafted well in advance; enabling the Finance Committee to receive timely information so that its recommendations (with explanations as well as vote summaries) on all articles can appear in the printed warrant, bringing about a formal Memorandum of Agreement for cooperation between town and schools, and possibly introducing a

lottery system for TM articles.

How to achieve good attendance and input at public hearings on these topics was a concern of the committee "I think we should send out invitations to all committees and groups in the town," member David Hearne said, "even the 'brick-throwers', those who always seem to be in opposition. Anyone with the energy and interest to do that should be given the chance to participate and to be part of the solution." Besides announcing public hearings in the Advocate and doing a cable TV interview, member Pat Zlotin suggested, cards should be handed to voters coming out of the polling place. In addition, the committee appeals to the public to send their e-mail addresses to acarney@easton.ma.us so they can be invited to public hearings.

The committee also plans to consider a "B" list of longer-term objectives, which include having TM before the election (reverse of present order), and changing the form of government to a representative TM

or a town council format. At its January meeting, the committee heard a presentation by Jeffrey Nutting, Town Administrator of Franklin, who has worked under all three of these government forms available to Massachusetts towns: open TM (all citizens can attend and vote); representative TM (e.g., 50 to 100 voting representatives elected by precincts); and a Town Council (e.g., nine elected voting representatives; no TM).

"I absolutely prefer the council format," said Mr. Nutting. "It is much easier to accomplish things with nine well-informed individuals." Hearne asked how the average citizen would make his or her voice heard "The council meets twice a month," Nutting explained, "and each article has a first and second reading where the public can comment before a vote is taken." Special-interest groups have much less weight in the town council format, he said.

The Government Study Committee's next meeting is Tuesday, March 12. All its meetings are open to the public.

Sharon Advocate,
February 15, 2002,
p. 2

Government Study Committee resumes deliberations

Having seen its initial recommendations successfully passed at Town Meeting last May, the Government Study Committee last Tuesday resumed its deliberations about how to improve town government.

Five members of the eight-member committee were present at Town Hall on Oct. 21 to discuss whether to recommend a change in Sharon's form of government from Open Town Meeting to Representative Town Meeting or a council.

"Before we recommend changing Open Town Meeting, we need to decide whether there is a crying need for change, something profoundly wrong with it," said Andrew Nebenzahl, a representative from the School Committee.

"It works well enough," George Bailey said, "but the lead time from proposals to Town Meeting decisions is too long, and because of procedure Open Town Meeting can't be innovative. A Representative Town Meeting allows more informed and deliberative changes." All members agreed they would need much public input before making a recommendation. Their next meeting, which anyone may attend, is Wednesday, November 12; a formal "public meeting" will also be scheduled.

The committee members emphasized it is vital to find ways to better inform the public about the issues. One way is via the town's website—www.townof-sharon.net—and they will ask se-

lectmen to direct all boards to post up-to-date membership lists and meeting minutes there, as well as at the Town Clerk's office. Another is to print for each warrant article not only the Finance Committee's recommendation but also the proponent's.

Other improvements discussed by the committee included all tellers' being sworn in at the beginning of TM; organizing warrant articles by topics so that voters could attend for particular topics they are interested in; and publishing the names of newly nominated Finance Committee members at least two weeks prior

to TM, possibly in the warrant. Anne Carney, chair, also confirmed that according to Town Clerk Marlene Chused, any secret ballot would be conducted in the same manner as at the last Town Meeting, with residents re-registering just before each vote, a cumbersome and time-consuming procedure but correct according to Ms. Chused and the Secretary of State's office.

Government Study recommendations approved last May were holding two Town Meetings per year (in hopes of shortening each), scheduling Town Meeting before the Election, and

starting TM at 7 instead of 8 pm. In addition, the Moderator, Paul Bouton, has limited speakers to 2 minutes (presenters 10) and scheduled no more than two evenings per week if Town Meeting runs long.

The Government Study Committee is composed of eight members—two designated by the Selectmen (Anne Carney, Pat Zlotin), two by the Finance Committee (Dave Fixler, Gloria Rose), and one each by the Moderator (George Bailey), the School Committee (Andy Nebenzahl), the Planning Board, and the Personnel Board.

Sharon Advocate,
October 24, 2003,
p. 7

community
BUSINESS CARD DIRECTORY Ad

YOUR AD HERE.
CALL TODAY!

To advertise in the Community Business Card Directory, c

the control of the Commission.

- Article 32 - Voted to approve the formalizing of the composition, governance and responsibilities of the Priorities Committees, an ad hoc committee that consists of representatives of the School Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Board of Selectmen.

The Government Study Committee had recommended the formalization of ad hoc committees by Town Meeting ““ to provide citizens with better clarity and transparency.””

It will be the Priorities Committee’s responsibility ““ to make adjustments to proposed allocations of the town’s financial resources.””

Sharon Advocate,
June 6, 2003,
p. 5

Forum looks at government

By James Coughlin
CORRESPONDENT

Last Wednesday, the Sharon High School Library was the scene as the Government Study Committee held a public forum on the possibility of changing Sharon's form of government.

The hearing, for what Anne Carney, the chairwoman of the committee billed as "possible changes" was mostly confined to discussion on the possibility of changing Sharon's current structure of "open Town Meeting" to "representative Town Meeting" in which representatives could be chosen from every precinct.

Those at the forum also dis-

cussed whether to institute the use of secret ballots for Town Meeting.

About 40 people attended the two-hour hearing. No date has yet been set for another forum.

The Government Study Committee last year formulated a number of changes that were implemented regarding Town Meetings. These included, holding two meetings per year, one in the fall on zoning issues and one in the spring on budget issues and setting a starting time of 7 p.m.

These questions emanated out of the controversy during Town

STUDY, page 4

Sharon Advocate,
January 30, 2004,
p. 1

Town government under study

STUDY, from page 1

Meeting last year when an unsuccessful attempt was made by Sharon resident Marcia Liebman for a secret ballot for some of the articles related to school spending.

Carney and other members of the committee which included School Committee member Andy Nebanzahl and Sharon resident George Bailey posed the question more than once to the audience as to whether the town should take the necessary steps to seek voter approval for a Charter Commission to study the town's charter.

At one point during the meeting, Carney asked, "Should we propose a charter commission to move forward?"

"We did that 14 years ago and it, (charter review) went over like a brick," Carney said.

A majority of residents who spoke at the forum, said they support changing the structure of Town Meeting.

Among those criticizing the current structure was Dan Argumbeau, the husband of Conservation Commission Chairman Peg Argumbeau.

"I think that we are brainwashed into thinking that our elected representatives know more than we do," he said, adding, "special interests, rule."

He said he recalled an incident several years ago involving a developer who wanted a change on Rte 1

"There were nine people who were lining up to talk who were either related to him or worked for him," he said.

Another resident who spoke, Jim Goldsmith of Aztec Way, prefaced his remarks by saying he has lived in Sharon for less than 10 years and has lived in about 10 different towns.

He characterized the present system of Town Meeting as "awful," and said it excludes members of two important constituencies from actively partici-

pating in the process, namely working people and the elderly who he said, "don't have a lot of stamina."

"For a working person, [with children] to attend four nights of Town Meeting, it will require them to pay \$200. for babysitting," Spiegel said.

"There is a lot of intimidation in Town Meeting," Goldsmith said, a charge echoed by several other residents.

Several residents also said they have felt, or noticed, intimidation at the meetings.

Among them was Dan Siegel of Lyndon Road who said, "I have seen intimidation by people employed by the town. People feel intimidated," he said.

However, he said, he was not certain what public policy changes are needed in order to correct the problem.

"The use of representative Town Meeting or a Town Council would be just like the Board of Selectmen," he said.

One woman, who declined to give her name, also said she has felt intimidated in Town Meeting.

"There was the suckering and rude remarks from the kids who know my son from class" she said.

Paul Birnbaum of 11 Swift Road also criticized the influence of what he called, "special interest groups in town meeting."

"We need to think of the whole group," he said. "I recall several years ago, there were eight or nine issues for millions of dollars and each group was lining up for their issue," Birnbaum said.

Only three speakers testified in favor of keeping the present system of Town Meeting unchanged.

Among them was Sam Liao, chairman of the Sharon School Committee and Dr Ernest Kahn.

Kahn, like those who spoke against the present system, also criticized the existence within

Town Meeting of what he called, "factions."

Yet, he said, Open Town Meeting seems to be the best system yet devised to ensure issues are aired publicly.

"It is undemocratic," he said, "because persons can become a faction," he went on. "Some are environmentalists while others are economists. If 1,000 people attend Town Meeting, there will be 200 people opposed to something. I don't know of a better system. There is always an opportunity to be heard."

Liao, who by the end of this year's Town Meeting will have completed his second year as School Committee chairman, gave what he called, "a personal statement" about his involvement in town government.

"I am amazed that the town has allowed me to be involved to the extent that I have," he said.

Liao, who moved to Sharon from Somerville several years ago previously served as a member of the Standing Building Committee before he was elected to the School Committee.

"Other towns have more entrenched groups who would not give up their seats, except for a relative," he said, adding, "The Town of Sharon encourages participation from a lot of people," Liao said.

The topic of secret ballot for Town Meeting was also discussed and Carney said she does not know of any Massachusetts town which has that system.

Towards the end of the meeting Carney said, "Your town charter can do what you want it to do."

In an interview after the meeting, Nebanzahl, a member of the Government Study Committee who is expected to seek re-election to the School Committee this year said, "We, will be getting together, soon for another meeting. Clearly, there are divided opinions. We need to work for consensus."

Town Meeting reforms discussed

By Richard Murphy
CORRESPONDENT

About two dozen residents and town officials gathered Tuesday night in the Community Center to participate in an open forum discussion entitled "Improvements to Town Meeting."

The Board of Selectmen presided over the session that was intended to spark discussion on possibly incorporating some reforms into the ages-old tradition of the open town meeting process as it exists in Sharon.

Conflicting meeting notices about the location and time of the forum may have held down the attendance.

Town Moderator Paul Bouton was present as were Town Clerk Marlene Chused; Anne Carney, chairman of the town's Government Study Committee; community activist George Bailey; and a smattering of other town officials and interested town residents.

For about 75 minutes, the group discussed a number of issues related to town meeting practices in Sharon, ranging from secret ballots to curtail real or imagined intimidation of voters to the time consumed by town meeting, the length of time allotted to speakers, and the possibility of changing from open town meeting to the representative form which has been adopted by a number of area communities at various times in the past.

Selectman Joe Roach convened the session prior to the arrival of Selectmen Chairman Norman Katz by saying, "We're open for suggestions."

David Gordon, of East Street, outlined three major recommendations he said, if adopted, would help to increase the efficiency and streamline the operation of town meeting in Sharon.

His first suggestion called for the addition of pro and con statements that would accompany each warrant article. These brief statements would summarize the major reasons for adoption or rejection of the various articles. Gordon wasn't sure who would author these statements, possibly town counsel, he said.

"It's important for town residents to become more informed

MEETING, page 5

Sharon Advocate,
March 26, 2004,
p. 1

Forum looks at ways to improve Town Meeting

MEETING, from page 1

(about town meeting and town issues)," Gordon added.

He also recommended someone give a 20 to 30 minute overview at the "very beginning of town meeting" that would look at the sum total of what was incorporated in the town warrant — how much would all articles cost in total if passed, what would be the impact on budgets and the tax rate, Prop 2 1/2 implications, and how much state aid is expected, etc.

"This statement should be delivered," he said, "by someone who has a clear idea of the town's finances and who can present an overall context of the meeting for those in attendance."

He also recommended much more extensive use of visual aids, large screen projectors and the like, for easy presentation to voters.

"These are simple ideas," he said, "but they would make people feel more informed and get away from the usual jargon and technical talk heard at most town meeting sessions."

Bailey said he supported strongly what Gordon was proposing in the way of reforms for town meeting in Sharon.

"It's impossible to totally inform the electorate. I favor the representative form of government rather than random government (open town meeting)," Bailey added.

Bailey also said the 10-minute speaking rule should also apply to opponents as well as proponents and he said a method is needed to allow certain speakers to exceed, when needed, the two-minute speaking limit im-

posed on speakers at town meeting.

Selectmen Chairman Norman Katz said, "This is a forum to share ideas, to see how we can make town meeting better. It's basically a compromise situation. We all want to do what is best. People want to be heard and they have a right to be heard."

Resident Joe Gopen said the timing of town meeting is poor.

"At the end of the day, people are tired. It's a task to come out several nights to town meeting. What about holding it on a Sunday afternoon? People might have more energy then. Refreshments could be available. Families could attend. It might be a little more user-friendly to find a different time."

Carney said her committee finds the community to be evenly divided at 50-50 over the question of open versus representative town meeting. "Some felt intimidated. Some felt it wasn't pure democracy. People come and lobby for their own issues. I think people are looking for more efficiency. Some say keep open town meeting. Some say change it."

Carney said it may be time for the town to adopt a charter rather than just rely on town by-laws to operate the town.

"If we move in this direction, we'll need more outside (consulting) help," she noted.

Alice Cheyer asked Carney the advantage of having a charter.

Carney said, "You tighten everything up. Things are delineated. This would make town government more efficient."

Carney said her committee isn't making any recommenda-

tions that would be acted on at the May Town Meeting, but may do so at the fall Town Meeting.

Other residents advocated more wider usage of the town's web site for dissemination of town meeting-related information.

Resident Len Segal, said, "It's a mobile society today. I think we, as a society, have pretty much outgrown open town meeting. We're too diverse today. The people can still attend a representative type of town meeting. They can speak. They just don't vote. We really need to have a serious discussion about this."

A lengthy discussion ensued about people being intimidated at town meeting and what can be done about it.

Katz said, "If someone feels intimidated, there's a reason for that. People can be cruel. But, is the secret ballot the answer? We need to find some kind of mechanism to overcome this."

Carney said her committee "took this matter very seriously."

Chused said Sharon conducts secret ballots "legally" and not like some other communities do.

The consensus of those present was that such secret ballot votes should be used "sparingly."

Keslie Koval said she felt the present form of town meeting should be retained.

The matter of establishing quorums was also discussed.

Bouton, speaking about the number of speakers at town meeting, said, "I don't want to abuse my power as moderator (in running town meeting)."

"Open town meeting is very precious," said Cheyer "I think this form of government is a precious thing. You don't find this around anywhere very much."

At the end of the forum, Katz promised everyone involved in running Town Meetings in Sharon will take these suggestions to heart and work toward improving the process as much as possible.

Local shop offers custom-made couture for women

CREATIONS, from page 1

ideas specifically for her. When she found the design she liked, they then went through countless fabric samples to complete the garment to Lewis' taste.

"Her designs are fabulous," said Lewis, whose mother was also in the store having Spyridopoulos alter her gown for the family event.

In addition to bridal and

eveningwear for women, Sabella Couture carries flower girl dresses, mother of the bride and groom dresses, as well as bridal accessories. The store also carries a line of skin care products that are the creation of a local beautician.

Sabella Couture is open Tuesday through Friday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Should we keep Town Meeting on life support?

By George Bailey
LOCAL OPINION

Is the New England Town Meeting form of government an anachronism — an 18th century institution ill-suited for the 21st? We need look no further than last spring's Town Meeting for the answer.

In three nights and just short of twelve hours last May, the Town Meeting, conducted in a faultlessly democratic manner, dealt with a \$60 million operating budget and capital expenditures of \$4 million, preservation of the Wilber School, a new cell tower bylaw, a new historical district, and authorization to place the adoption of the Community Preservation Act on the November ballot. Also scheduled was the annual "election" of several citizens to the Finance Committee.

With a thirty-six article warrant, just 267 residents on the first night, 186 on the second, and 177 on the third showed up to conduct "the town's business" out of an eligible electorate of about 12,000.

Since some of those present were the 60 or more elected and appointed town officials who needed to be present, the actual public at large were represented by slightly over 1.5 percent the first night, and about 1 percent on the following two nights. Of that small assembly, it is likely that many had only cell towers on their mind since Article 24 didn't come to the floor

until the third night.

Why did 98.5 percent of the voters stay away from the Town Meeting? Explanations for this apparent voter apathy range from the weather, two working-parent families, conflicts with working hours, intramural sports or to the taxpayer protection provided by Proposition 2 1/2.

A look at the warrant itself shows why the voting public may have had far better reasons for not showing up. Fifteen of the 36 articles on the agenda were listed in the warrant as "report to be given at Town Meeting."

The knowledgeable discussion of the twelve capital borrowing articles was limited by the lack of any long range capital plan

Seven articles covering tax exemptions for seniors and veterans or employee retirement costs included references to Mass General Laws (which most voters do not have at their finger tips) and were presented absent estimates of the potential cost. The usual article accepting Chapter 90 Highway funds provided no clue that an additional \$100,000 would be involved.

Last but not least the "election" on the town meeting floor for new members of the Finance Committee — would be carried out as usual with no prior notice until announced by the nominating committee moments before the vote.

Over a quarter of the net town budget is influenced by State assessments and State Aid. A voter

entering the meeting with the warrant in one hand and the town report in the other would still have no clue as to what the assessments for various state programs such as Norfolk County, MBTA, MAPC, Mosquito Control, are likely to be nor the substantial state aid to such programs as school building construction, school operating expenses, student transportation and highway construction or occasional federal or state grants.

These exceptions with all these unanswered questions, are *not* new. These conditions have prevailed for years. A glance at the 1950 warrant shows almost an identical format. A key difference: a population of 3,600 then — 18,000 now, but there are others as well.

For several years, the Town Government Study Committee has been thinking about, and in several instances changing, the way Town Meeting is conducted. But major reforms are impossible in the face of the twice-year batch of issues of highly varying complexity which must be examined, discussed, scaled up or down, before they reach the town meeting agenda. Correcting these timing problems, a virtual impossibility as decades of Boards of Selectmen, Planning Boards and Finance Committees can attest.

Let no one misunderstand the point of this discussion. Be careful about what you hope for.

If we succeeded in correcting the information gap by presenting all this information and attracting any significant number of voters, not only would the warrant have to be delivered by UPS, but any substantial turnout for the meeting would likely cause a monstrous failure and we would all petition for reform.

Sitting in one room with 6,000 voters (the accepted quorum — 50 percent of eligible voters — for deliberative bodies the world over), debating, amending, tabling, postponing, passing 36 articles could well take a month.

For many students of government, the only solution is a carefully thought out enactment of a more representative form — not simply on the meeting floor, but in all areas of local government — retaining the specialized boards and commissions but simplifying the administrative and legislative process. The goal should be to increase accountability while enlarging the ability of the citizen to gain access to local government. This essay attempts only to describe the problem.

The next step is to look carefully at town government as it operates in Sharon, noting its evolutionary character, its strengths and weaknesses and the alternatives available.

George Bailey is a member of the Town Government Study Committee and volunteer in Town government since 1958.

Sharon Advocate,
August 27, 2004,
p. 12

Officials seek a town charter for government

By Richard Murphy
CORRESPONDENT

Town officials this week have embarked on a course that could lead to the creation and adoption of the town's first charter, but the process won't likely be completed until 2008 or 2009.

Since its incorporation as a town, Sharon has operated under town bylaws that are periodically added to or modified, and need state approval.

Selectman Bill Heitin said once a charter — which serves to outline the operation of town government — is in place, the town would no longer need state approval to make bylaw changes.

"More and more communities are developing their charters," he said.

In Sharon, the town operates under an open Town Meeting, and that may or may not remain as a town charter is developed and ultimately, voted on.

Anne Carney, chairwoman of the town's Government Study Committee, met with selectmen Tuesday night and told the board her committee has made progress since several of the committee's recommendations have been adopted by Town Meeting in the past several years.

"Our committee has accomplished what it could in helping to make small changes (in Sharon's local government), but we really feel that we need an elected charter commission to take a broad new look at the structure of our local government," Carney said. "It's a big project and we'll need a big group of people to show that they are interested in (forming) a charter commission."

Although such a committee was formed years ago, it became inactive for some time until Carney's Government Study Committee was formally reconstituted in 2001.

Selectmen Tuesday night appeared receptive to Carney's call for a charter commission.

Selectman William Heitin said he thinks this is overdue.

"We should take a hard look at the form of our town government here in Sharon," he said. "It could stay the same (after the charter process has played out), be tweaked or radically changed."

Carney, indicating her committee's work is done, said future changes "should be up to a charter commission to recommend. Our committee could just become dormant or Town Meeting

TOWN CHARTER, page 12

Sharon Advocate,
October 28, 2005,
p. 1

A town charter sought by officials

TOWN CHARTER, *from page 1*
could dissolve it.”

Selectman Walter “Joe” Roach said her committee could be dissolved at anytime.

Andy Nebenzahl, a member of the Government Study Committee as well as the School Committee, said he feels the committee has gone as far as it can.

“Anne has been chairwoman for quite awhile and she’s done a superb job, keeping us on track, providing great leadership, etc.,” he said. “I think the Government Study Committee should make its report to Town Meeting and then be dissolved.”

Carney sketched out the process involved in getting a charter commission formed in Sharon, adding this process should not be rushed.

First, she recommended the

town collect nearly 2,000 signatures (15 percent of the town’s registered voters) by early fall next year, and that in this time, the community as to what the process is, how it would play out, the role of the state in the process and the various timelines that must be met once the process is underway.

The next step is a town vote, either at Town Meeting or town election. Carney said she favors town election because more people be apt to vote. Residents interested in sitting on a charter commission would seek nominations by collecting 50 signatures.

In the May 2007 ballot, Carney said voters would decide whether to form a charter commission and also vote on who should be elected to the commission. If a majority favors forming

the commission, the nine people with the most votes would comprise the official charter commission in Sharon.

Various state deadlines and other legal requirements would then kick in and the commission would carry out its work, likely with a paid consultant on board to advise the commission.

Sixteen months after forming, Carney said a draft report would have to be filed with the state, with a final version submitted no more than 8 months after the process began.

The final step would be the ratification of the completed charter at the annual town election in May 2008 or 2009.

According to Carney, these votes must take place at regular annual town elections and not at special town elections.

Is it time for five selectmen?

TM voters to debate issue Monday at the high school

By Shannon Haley Daggett
STAFF WRITER

When there is a 2-1 vote on the current Board of Selectmen, one can make an educated guess on who the dissenter is from past votes.

But is this unfair for Selectman David Grasfield who casts the lone vote, with Selectmen William Heitin and Walter "Joe" Roach on the majority side?

Some question if this is just one of the indications that a more diverse board of five members is in order.

One resident, Marjorie Asnes, is sponsoring Town Meeting Article 5 to increase the Board of Selectmen, for the first time since Sharon was born, to five members. Town Meeting is Monday, 7 p.m., at Sharon High School.

"The Board of Selectmen consisted of three people in 1783, and since that time the responsibilities that have come across the board of selectmen has increased tenfold but the number of select-

SELECTMEN COMPARISON

Monday night Sharon Town Meeting members will vote whether to increase Board of Selectmen size from three to five members. Below, how area towns measure up.

Town	Number of selectmen	Population
Canton	5	20,000
Dedham	5	23,500
Easton	5	23,000
Foxboro	5	17,000
Medfield	3	13,000
Norwood	5	30,000
Sharon	3	18,000
Stoughton	5	27,000
Walpole	5	23,000
Westwood	3	15,000

men hasn't increased at all," she said.

Meanwhile, opposers to this article say residents need to wait to make a more educated guess, es-

SELECTMEN, page 2

Sharon Advocate,
November 11, 2005,
p. 1

Five selectmen article to be voted on at TM

SELECTMEN, from page 1

pecially since the town formed the Government Study Committee to address the issue of a more effective way of running town government

"I don't have a personal opinion on the differences between three and five," Heitin said "I think we should diligently plan what we should do.... the town has taken a deliberate step four years ago to put together a Government Study Committee that has been reviewing the way Sharon runs its form of government."

Heitin said this committee is expected to bring forward its final report at the spring Town Meeting "which is my understanding to recommend the establishment of a charter commission to ultimately develop the town's charter "

A charter is described by Heitin as the town's Constitution. In the process, the Board of Selectmen may end up increasing or a town counsel may be formed or it may stay at three members.

Anne Carney, a Government Study Committee member, said Article 5 is a Band Aid approach that won't heal the town government issue

"We don't believe going three

to five will solve the major issue — the way the structural government works," she said.

Meanwhile, Grasfield said he is "very much in favor" of Article 5.

"I have supported the idea since before I joined the board," he said in e-mail to the Advocate. "My primary reason is the need to increase the diversity of perspectives, the quality of debate and the creativity of approaches and solutions concerning matters before the board."

When Asnes collected the signatures to put the article on the warrant last August, she said she had no problem getting residents to sign

"People just thought it was a good idea," she said. "They know we've grown, the community is much bigger than it was, the burden of responsibility on selectmen is much bigger, and people thought (increasing board size) just made sense so we kept it going collecting almost 300 signatures, though we were going to stop at 130."

If Town Meeting approves Article 5, it then goes on a town election ballot as a Home Rule Petition. Canton increased its board size to five members a year and a half ago

As for whether this is a Band Aid approach, Asnes said she supports what the Government Study Committee is doing, but thinks something needs to be done now

"I am talking about today, for the next few years, to do what we can until such time someone comes up with something better," she said.

Asnes was inspired to put this article on the warrant after attending Town Meeting last spring, when an identical proposal to increase the Board of Selectmen membership was rejected. At that time, the Finance Committee was opposed to the article, but this fall, the majority of the committee are in support, citing in its decision that the Board of Selectmen's workload "is greater than ever" and more members would allow more representation of residents

"Some of the proponents think having additional members on the board will allow for better distribution of the work, and I disagree," Heitin said.

He explained that while the selectmen vote on policies and make decisions, it is the town employees who do the work.

"That's where we should focus our efforts," he said.

A town divided

A single vote keeps selectmen at three

By Richard Murphy
CORRESPONDENT

By the slimmest of margins, one vote, an article seeking to increase the number of selectmen in Sharon from three to five was defeated after a heated debate at Town Meeting Monday night.

Because of the 112 to 111 vote not to increase the number of selectmen, the town will now follow the course favored by two members on the Board of Selectmen and the town's Government

Study Committee: to create a charter commission through a town election. This commission will review Sharon's town government structure and then make recommendations to the town's electorate.

Many voters joined the lengthy debate but the real fireworks erupted during the voting process and a later attempt to reconsider the close vote.

After the first standing vote on the article was taken and tallied,

but not announced, Town Moderator Paul Bouton declared it a non-vote because "a few people said their votes weren't counted. We have to get this right."

He then ruled another vote would be required on the article

After the second vote was taken, Bouton, in announcing the results of the voting, added the first vote, while ruled invalid, arrived at the same result — a one-vote majority to defeat the proposal.

"But there were less people voting the second time," he said.

It's typical at Town Meeting, for voters to leave while others arrive at any given moment.

Although the official attendance for Monday's session was 405, the vote on this article totaled only 223 votes cast.

Town Meeting voters were voting on a motion made by the Finance Committee to approve the article, which, if passed, would

TM, page 7

What TM voters said on Article 5

In favor

Former Selectman Ed Little: "I never agreed with the Fin-Com before, but I do tonight. I really believe Sharon needs a five-man board of selectmen. We have to get out of the 17th century and into the 21st."

Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Goodman: "In a town that values its diversity, we would be more likely to see that diversity reflected on a board comprised of five members. There are many communities with five-member boards of selectmen, including Canton, Stoughton, Dedham, Easton and Norwood."

In opposition

Resident Ken Olin: "We defeated this six months ago. We should do the same now. We'll see uncontested races in the future (if this change occurs)."

Former Zoning Board Chairman Ed Hershfield: "The workload has increased, but we don't need more lay people. We need more people with expertise to provide information to the selectmen. Give people the input they need and let them make the decision. More people doesn't mean better decisions."

Sharon Advocate,
November 18, 2005,
p. 1

Five selectmen article defeated by one vote

TM, from page 1

have called for a five-member Board of Selectmen subject to being ratified by voters on a town election ballot as a Home Rule Amendment, most likely at next May's Annual Town Election.

The FinCom had endorsed the article by a 5-3-1 vote, changing its negative recommendation last spring when the same proposal was brought forward.

Voters at that time voted to indefinitely postpone the article, effectively killing the proposal.

On Monday night, when the motion was made to reconsider the vote, one voter stood up and said he had been watching the meeting at home on television and raced to the high school auditorium to cast his vote for reconsideration.

The Advocate asked one man, who arrived with his coat on and was leaving immediately after the reconsideration vote was announced, if he had just come in to vote for reconsideration of the article and he said he had.

The motion to reconsider the vote failed by a 125 to 93 margin.

Town resident, Marjorie Asnes, was the sponsor of Article 5. In her reasons to increase board size, she cited the workload on the present board and five members would bring more

perspectives.

Another sentiment expressed by some speakers was the 2-1 split votes that occur quite often on the present board, with Selectmen Chairman David Grasfield often in the minority.

During the discussion, Grasfield strongly endorsed the article, citing a number of reasons why he felt five would be better than three.

"I support the increase in the board of selectmen. I did in the past. I do now," he said. "And I will in the future."

Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Goodman, speaking on behalf of the board's majority, said there are a variety of reasons to vote in favor of this change.

"First, a board of five members would allow for more full and open discussions," he said. "The dynamics of a three-member board has the potential to limit the ability to fully discuss matters when there is a divergence of opinion.

The FinCom report emphasized that "the most compelling argument made to support this article is the fact that the town of Sharon is facing more and more issues that require more and more time and effort of our elected officials."

After the meeting, Anne Carney, chairwoman of the Government Study Committee, said,

the close vote indicated just how real this issue is.

She said she hopes in a decision will be made at the town's annual election in May to elect a charter commission to look at this whole question of Sharon's government structure.

Carney's committee was reactivated four years ago and has already made some bylaw revisions ratified by Town Meeting, but the committee recently told selectmen it's done all it can do, and a charter commission is the next logical step.

Carney termed Article 5 "a Band-Aid approach" to the issue.

Some supporters of the article conceded the charter commission route was a good approach, but cited it would take four or five years for this process to play out and maintained the town needs to take action immediately to take care of the here and now. In other words, they agreed with both arguments.

In addressing Town Meeting, Asnes said, "Even if we go to a council form of government, we'll still need more people. We need new blood. More input is more democratic and it shares the workload. Quite often, a majority of two out of three is not good. Many people agree with this. Every town that touches Sharon has five."

Asnes also pointed out that

most all of Sharon's various boards and committees have five or more members right now. "I'm sure we could get enough good, qualified candidates to run for selectman. Change isn't bad."

Asnes' remarks were applauded by many voters in the audience.

Former Selectmen Colleen Tuck and Mike Cook spoke in opposition to the article.

David Fixler, a member of the Government Study Committee, said: "Look at towns with budgets like ours and they all have three selectmen. Every year, we have the potential to change 33 1/3 percent of the Board of Selectmen."

Ken Goldberg, of Castle Drive, added, "We need to just look at what we need here, no matter what other towns do. There's lots of uncertainties here. We should make a decision now. What's magic about the number 5? Is it more than the number 3? It's really a dynamic. Certain dynamics enter into a group of three that don't present in groups of five or more."

Paul Pietal, former chairman of the Finance Committee, was strongly in favor of Article 5, saying, "A charter commission and this article aren't mutually exclusive."