

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN SUB-COMMITTEE
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

March 3, 2016

7:30 A.M. Town Hall – Selectmen’s Room

Posted in accordance with the provisions of M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §20b

Meeting opened at 7:40 A.M.

Present: Chairman Stephen Gray; Members: Dick Ward; Jack Angley; John Cotter; and James Grimes

Also in Attendance: Ellen Blanchard-Director of Assessing; Dee Vincino-Assessors’ Office; Michael Paduch-Member of Board of Assessors; Laura Shippee; Meg Lamay-Town Accountant; Michael Milanoski-Town Administrator

Clerk: Kari Poudrier

Approval of Minutes for February 25, 2016

Motion by Angley, Ward 2nd

Voted-Unanimous

1. Discussion relative to adopting rules and regulations for Town Meeting so as to improve efficiency
 - Tabled until next meeting
2. Discussion and review DOR report/presentation regarding Town financial management operations and policies
 - The Town Administrator reviewed the presentation given at the Board of Selectmen Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee held on Feb. 27th
 - The Town Administrator shared the good news that Citigroup offered a 25 year bond at an improved rating/interest rate so as to help fund the new school
 - The four step budget preparation process that was recommended by the Governance Committee and approved by the Board of Selectmen previously is on track to be completed by March 12th
 - Following certain Department of Revenue and Town Auditor recommendations, the School Department budget appears to be balanced
 - The Town is using currently the Pay-Go System, approved at Town Meeting; the Town Administrator also noted the budget is tight

Gray questioned if money can be moved

TA explained Town Management approved the Pay-Go System policy which allows monies to be moved when necessary

The Town Administrator continued with the following presentation points:

- The Town Assessor and Health Agent are retiring, providing the opportunity to improve efficiencies
- Evaluation of the Planning, Environment & Permitting Department and acknowledgement of needed staffing changes to improve efficiency
- The need to build a Human Resource Department over the next two years and a Town-wide procurement office to better protect tax payer resources
- Role of Assistant to the Town Administrator expanded so as to coordinate Town-wide HR & procurement activities

Angle questioned if there is enough work for that position

TA responded in the affirmative and stated that the procurement position will have authority to perform these duties

Cotter questioned what the HR function would be, while also noting procurements for school spending already go through the office of the Town Administrator

The Town Administrator continued with the following presentation points:

- Review of recommended Planning, TA Office, Fire, and Finance Department flowchart positions
- Restructuring of Town financial operations from three departments into one consolidated department. In the meantime, improved communication is occurring due to weekly meetings among the three departments which the Town Accountant is chairing

Angle questioned how the offices would work under the proposed flowchart

TA noted the use of proceeds from free cash to fund a finance assistant in the Assessors' Office (to be current Assessor, Ellen Blanchard) for three months so as to assist with the transition. After the three month period, the situation will be re-evaluated to determine if another person is needed

Cotter suggested not going with another position for three months and keeping Blanchard only for the three months

TA explained he wants to get through the reorganization transition period without cutting any staff

Ward spoke of his concerns regarding the cross training of three departments and suggested adding another part time position to assist with the workload

Gray questioned whether, under the proposed structure, there would be enough staff to

make this work

TA noted the Department of Revenue report indicated a net savings of approximately \$50,000 under the proposed reorganization, even after outsourcing appraisals conducted previously by assessing department staff

Gray questioned if the \$50,000 annual savings reflected in the DOR reports is accurate

TA stated the net savings has changed to about \$21,000 after reevaluation of the recommended changes

Ward noted the School & Town health insurance costs increasing by 8% will be taking up a sizeable portion of the budget. He talked about his desire to avoid laying off anyone going forward

Blanchard reviewed prior years staffing; she also explained that outsourcing expenses using the model of the past 14 years has saved the Town money

Gray asked Blanchard to give her opinion regarding the recommended changes to the Assessors' Office

Blanchard stated she does not believe the recommended consolidation is uncommon, based on similar models in other communities. She noted her concern regarding the Assessors' Office in particular. She stated that Vicino is a great customer service person who will no longer be able to perform all she does now under the proposed organizational chart. Blanchard does administrative work as well as property valuations which is how revenue is brought into the Town. She believes a one person office will be a disservice to the taxpayers as well as to the Town, as there is too much to do and support staff will most definitely be needed.

Gray noted that if the recommended changes are made, it appears there will not be enough staff in the Assessors' Office to manage the workload

Angle stated his concerns that the small town service taxpayers now receive will be lost if the Assessors' Office is not staffed properly under the proposed reorganization

Paduch also noted that the Assessors' Office provides residents with friendly explanations of how their property is being taxed

Vicino stated she does have a problem with the proposed reorganization and being alone in the Assessors' Office; there is too much work and she is also concerned that when she is out of the Office, there would be no back up. She suggests at least a part time employee commitment

Gray suggested revisiting after 6 months to assess how much additional staffing will be needed

Angle stated flexibility is needed due to having only one person in the office under the proposed reorganization

Gray questioned what will happen after Blanchard retires and what Vicino's needs will be in order to complete the amount of paperwork.

Blanchard stated she will speak with the TA if the office lacks necessary staffing

Ward stated the Assessors are an elected board and are necessary to assist following the outsourcing of real estate appraisals

Gray stated the elected Board of Assessors should stay

Blanchard noted the Treasurer/Collector & Assessors' Office are working well together now

Gray asked LaMay to share her input

LaMay stated the weekly meetings among she, as the Town Accountant, the Assessors' Office, and the Treasurer/Tax Collector, have helped tremendously and the departments are working well together

Gray questioned why change anything if everything is working well

Angley asked if LaMay has been going to the TA with problems

LaMay explained that she goes to the departments first, but that there are problems with communication among the departments and stated that work cannot get six months behind as it has in the past. She has had problems obtaining reports and a Finance Director is needed to identify problems

TA stated issues have been echoed by the other finance departments, along with DOR and the Town Auditor

Blanchard gave a brief review of the model used in the Assessors' Office for the past 14 years, stating that it had saved the Town money; she echoed Vicino's concerns about understaffing of the Assessors' Office under the proposed organizational chart

Gray thanked everyone for their input.

3. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chairman 48 hours in advance of meeting

- Not discussed

4. Next Meeting

- Monday, March 7th at 6:00pm

5. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn at 9:40 am by Ward , 2nd by Anglely, Unanimous