

Harvard Charter Commission
Meeting Minutes
December 1, 2016
Town Hall

Members present: Paul Cohen (Chair), Rick Maiore, Sharon McCarthy, George McKenna, Stephanie Opalka, Ron Ostberg, Charles Redinger, Cindy Russo, Peter Warren

Paul called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. Minutes from 11/3 and 11/17 will be addressed at the next meeting.

Public Hearing

Commission members discussed the outcome of the 11/17 public hearing.

Some expressed concern that:

- Attendance was so low – only 16 residents came to the hearing.
- People misunderstand what the charter is for and so will be disappointed in the outcome.
- People aren't yet engaged in what the commission is doing. Members commented:
 - In general there's less volunteer involvement in town and in society, less sense of obligation to participate.
 - Demographics of the town are different than 20 years ago.
 - Many newer residents come for the schools and move when their children graduate and thus are less vested in the town.
- Attendees got into the details of how things are or are not working, but not a higher level of how things could evolve. Members commented:
 - There is no steward of what Harvard wants to be.
 - The charter needs to have someone in charge of the vision.

Commissioners also heard that residents were frustrated in the execution of governing because things aren't getting done. There is confusion about who to go to for answers. Centralization of people doing the work means those people have too many competing priorities.

Discussion followed about different forms of management – matrix, centralized, and decentralized.

The issue of civility came up in several discussions.

- How do you impose civility?
- Have board members sign a civility pledge just as they sign a conflict of interest pledge.
- How do you mediate incivility?
- Define board responsibilities, including civility.

Paul proposed looking at a new governing model for the town, which he calls an integrated model. It is the model the schools operate on: the elected School Committee hires the Superintendent who then hires the principals who hire their staff. Paul said that when the schools experience problems, there is one organization to handle things through a reporting structure of the principals, the superintendent, and the School Committee. He asked the members

if that governing model would work for the town. Everything would flow through the Board of Selectmen (BOS), who would appoint people, now elected, to boards. If things are not done, the selectmen would be responsible.

Comments about the new model:

- We can't have a vision unless someone is setting it.
- Goal is to have priorities set by BOS
- This would require a radical shift in thinking by the BOS and Town Administrator (TA).
- TA would have more responsibility and accountability for the functioning of town government.
- Need to get feedback from the boards.
- The model could work since it works for the schools. An advantage is that newcomers who come from urban areas are more familiar with this type of government structure.
- More people may sign up for boards if they were appointed rather than elected. It's expensive to run for election and many qualified people are not comfortable running.
- It may stimulate more candidates for BOS.
- Being appointed as opposed to elected doesn't diminish the authenticity of the office holder.
- Need to understand which boards are appointed and which elected. Either method they are still statutory.
- Harvard may need more money in order to manage more effectively. The Commission should not limit its consideration of government structures just because they may be more costly.
 - Need public facilities director and a highway director to take care of town buildings and infrastructure
 - Need more support staff for departments, less reliance on volunteers
 - Frustration is that we don't have the resources to get the work done.
- More people would attend a public hearing to discuss a change like this. Some people don't want to keep the status quo and want a wide-ranging discussion.

For the next steps, the commission needs to identify what executives are needed and define responsibilities and consequences. It also needs to decide the role of consultants in identifying elected vs. appointed positions and in conducting the next public hearing.

- Cindy will rewrite Section 3.2: Board of Selectmen.
- Stephanie and Sharon will draft a preamble that addresses the issue of civility and diversity. Cindy will work with them to incorporate civility with Section 3.2.
- Ron will work on planning, vision, economic development and the master plan.
- Charles will list 20 to 30 possible scenarios that should be addressed.
- George will work on Section 5.5 (new): Facilities

Ron suggested setting out the town's values at the beginning, including civility and inclusiveness.

Next meeting – December 15, 7 p.m., Town Hall 2nd floor

Paul adjourned the meeting at 9 p.m.

Laura Andrews, recorder