

Harvard Charter Commission
Meeting Minutes
December 15, 2016
Town Hall

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

Paul called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and the commission approved the minutes of the 11/17 public hearing and the 12/1 regular meeting.

Preamble

Members approved the preamble to the charter (attached), written by Stephanie, Sharon, and Ron, which will be added to the draft charter and the Charter Commission website.

Executive Function

Cindy handed out an edited Article 3: Elected [and Appointed] Officers, which led to a discussion about the benefits and/or pitfalls of elected vs. appointed positions. The discussion led back to the role of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) as the executive body, taking on more executive function that they currently have:

- Setting the town vision and direction
- Hiring or appointing the people who will execute the vision
- Facilitating inter-board communication and problem resolution

The point was made several times that, whether elected or appointed, boards need to maintain some independence to function effectively. The BOS needs to operate at a higher level and not concern itself with the details of the boards. Paul recommends this model of governance be referred to as the “integrated model.”

Other items discussed included:

- Changing the role of the Finance Committee (FinCom) and the appointment of members of the Capital Planning and Investment Committee (CPIC). Under the Integrated model, FinCom would function as the independent financial advisor to the Town Meeting. Currently the Moderator appoints FinCom members and the BOS appoints the two CPIC at-large members. The three other CPIC members are ex-officio from BOS, FinCom, and the School Committee. Having the Moderator appoint the two at-large members would maintain the independence of CPIC from BOS.
- Doing away with Town Caucus and moving to nomination papers. If BOS is the only elected board, then there is no need for a caucus.

Ron volunteered to write a preamble to the BOS section to on the responsibilities of the executive branch under the integrated model.

Legislative Function

The citizens who vote at Town Meeting will continue to be the legislature of the town. As part of the legislative model, the Town Moderator will continue to be elected and continue to appoint the Finance Committee, which is an advisory committee of Town Meeting. Discussion followed about whether CPIC should also be appointed by the Moderator.

Paul will write up a preamble for the legislative branch on the role of the Moderator and of Town Meeting.

Commissioners agreed that it would be helpful to describe each board-committee in terms of whether its members are elected or appointed, what its statutory requirements are, and how it interacts with other board-committees to get its job done.

Cindy volunteered to prepare this information.

Goal Setting

Commissioners discussed the timing of when the BOS sets its annual goals and agreed that goals should be set after Annual Town Meeting (ATM), not on a calendar-year cycle. Those goals should be the core from which policy grows, Ron said. Cindy added that committees could set yearly goals to meet the BOS goals. At each ATM, the BOS and the School Committee would give a State of Our Town report as part of Warrant Article 1 – reports of the town. These oral reports to Town Meeting would clearly state what progress had been made over the previous year on the town achieving the goals set out by the BOS and School Committees.

Ron will add this information to the Preamble.

Paul summarized the discussion, saying that residents say the current governance problem results from no clear lines of authority and responsibility. Making the BOS into an executive board would solve the problems if it:

1. Took responsibility for administering policy
2. Appointed all town boards
3. Coordinated overlapping authority among town boards
4. Set annual goals
5. Reported to the town on progress toward those goals

Charter Commission Timeline and Deadlines

April 12, 2016 – election of Commissioners

May 25, 2016 – first public hearing

November 17, 2016 – second public hearing

TBD, 2017 – third public hearing

August 14, 2017 – preliminary report deadline

October 12, 2017 – final report deadline

Next meeting – January 5, 7:30 p.m., Town Hall 2nd floor

Paul adjourned the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Laura Andrews, recorder