

Harvard Charter Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 2, 2017
Hildreth House Dining Room

Members present: Paul Cohen (Chair), Rick Maiore, George McKenna, Stephanie Opalka, Ron Ostberg, Charles Redinger, Peter Warren. Members absent: Sharon McCarthy, Cindy Russo. Others present: School Superintendent Linda Dwight and School Committee members Jon Green, Nancy Lancellotti, SusanMary Redinger, John Ruark, Mary Traphagen, chair; Planning Board Chair Erin McBee.

Paul Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and acknowledged that the commission had received and read the letter from the School Committee. He also said they recognize that the School Committee is an independent, autonomous organization and lies outside the purview of the charter. One area of correspondence has to do with elections and terms.

Summary of School Committee Position in General

The School Committee and school administration are working well now and making changes would risk that success.

Summary of School Committee Position on Key Topics

Two-year vs. Three-year Terms – two-year terms are too short for School Committee members to come fully up to speed. The committee would be less effective, especially if multi-year projects are underway.

Staggered vs. Coterminous Elections – terms should be staggered to avoid the possibility of complete turnover of a committee.

Elected vs. Appointed Committees – (School Committee stays elected) SusanMary questioned whether the Select Board would have enough time to appoint all non-school, non-library, and non-Warner Free Lecture committee members if terms were only two years.

November vs. May Elections – SusanMary said she doesn't see much of an impact if they have three-year, staggered terms so only one or two new people are starting in November. Nancy Lancellotti said she prefers coming on the spring to get to know people and the process. Plus, she said November is a busy time of year at the schools.

Increasing Participation – No one supported the idea that decreasing the length of terms would increase participation.

Budget Ownership – Paul explained that the commission is recommending that the Select Board be responsible for the budget and put the budget on the floor at Annual Town Meeting. Ron Ostberg added that since the Select Board would be formulating policy based on planning, it should recommend what funding is necessary to achieve its goals. SusanMary said she sees little impact for the schools since they manage their own budget, have their own finance manager, and the schools' operating budget generally passes without discussion. Her bigger concern is how the Capital Planning and Investment Committee plays into the change.

George McKenna said that CPIC would create a capital plan and submit it to the SB, which would then submit the plan at ATM. CPIC and FinCom would be the watch dogs with regard to the spending that supports the vision, which is the SB's mission. Both committees would advise and make recommendations to the SB and the voters at ATM.

Paul said it is not a material change in the process, more a recognition of ownership by the executive body. He added that implementation would be a series of joint board meetings in the early stages of the budget process. The School Committee, FinCom, CPIC, and the SB would discuss the needs of the community. CPIC would do what they do today – hold meetings with departments, go through the details, participate in another joint meeting – then ultimately the SB would present the operating and capital plans at ATM.

Town Facilities Director – This would be a new, paid position to oversee non-custodial work on all buildings in town. The commission-recommended model combines the building inspector and facilities manager position, which is funded by inspection fees.

Linda Dwight said that current responsibility for two schools and the administrative offices takes all of their facilities manager's time. She said he does a good job now and cannot take on more work. She thinks that collaborating on all the buildings with someone on the non-school buildings would take more time. She suggested that the town hire its own person who has the same skills – to make short-term repairs and give long-term visionary input of what needs to go to Capital. SusanMary strongly endorses an inspector/facilities manager for the town.

Linda said that the two people could work collaboratively on energy advisory issues, grants, and possibly procurement.

John Ruark asked if there could be economies of scale in purchasing or other facilities work, for example, cleaning. Charles pointed out that the library is currently managing its building on its own. Linda said that the company who cleans the schools is willing to do a town-wide contract that would include schools, library, and municipal buildings.

Summary of Planning Board Chair Erin McBee's Position on Key Topics

Two-year vs. Three-year Terms – Two years is too short. It takes more than two years to understand what's going on. Now they have four-year terms. The state mandates that planning board terms be between three and five years.

Staggered vs. Coterminous Elections – Agrees with the School Committee that this would be a problem.

Elected vs. Appointed Committees – No strong feeling about this. No one on the current board has expressed a strong preference. Erin said she might feel differently if more people were interested in running. Right now they are short a member and an alternate.

Term Limit, Committee Chair – Erin agrees that it would be good to rotate yearly.

Rick said the commissioners have been looking at a community development function under the purview of the Town Administrator. This person would work under the direction of the Board of Health, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Historical Commission and might help

solve the problems of getting people to serve and of having a central place for people or committees to go when they have questions about building projects. Erin said that the Planning Board is working to move the planner position that is currently contracted into a permanent position.

Charles asked about the availability of money to pay for such a position. Rick pointed out that money is currently being wasted in lost-opportunity costs and inefficiencies. Peter added that a knowledgeable full-time person could limit the number of times the town has to get legal advice, which would save money.

Ron said that the town could spend more money if the political will were there. If more money were needed to execute the master plan, the SB would have to find it. Whether raising taxes or cutting some services or finding savings, it would be a political process that would be resolved after discussions and resolution by a town meeting vote. The question came up again about whether this belongs in the charter, or as a bylaw, or just as a recommendation.

Erin said that Section 3-2 b (6) is confusing as to who is responsible for preparing the Master Plan. She will rewrite the section and send the revision and comments from the Planning Board to the commission.

Commissioners laid out what each has done or will do before the public hearing Saturday:

- Stephanie – info on Next Door Harvard, print 20 copies of the talking points
- Charles – put up sandwich boards and provide coffee and doughnuts
- Peter – put up posters in the General Store, Town Hall, post offices, the cleaners

More discussion followed about whether to focus more on leadership than participation, and where accountability fits in.

Next meeting is a public hearing Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m., second floor of Town Hall.

Paul adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Laura Andrews, Recorder