

GOVERNMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE
Minutes of Meeting Held at Town Hall
March 15th, 2012

Present: Janice Ablon, Allan Wallace, Holger Luther. In attendance: Dick Gandt

Chairman Luther opened the meeting at 7:06. The invited guest was Eldon Goodhue. We discussed the operation of the assessor's office. He believes that upon Nina's retirement the assessors are going to see if the work currently conducted in that office can be outsourced and done for less than it currently costs to support that office. He is also of the opinion that the entire town hall could be virtual in that physical tasks such as parks and recreation can be outsourced as can highway maintenance, record keeping etc. Alan suggested that this may be more than the scope of the GRC charter is ready to embrace, but that what the GRC will recommend could set the stage for such an evolution. Eldon stated that it is important to reduce the tax rate, as he visits with residents now who can't afford to bear the current levy. Alan responded that what may be done to streamline the administration of Town is small potatoes to the combined school budgets over which there is little control. Eldon stated that he has no objections to making the assessors an appointed office, but he also pointed out that he has had arguments over that issue with other members of the board.

At 8:30 Paula Burke joined the meeting. She indicated that her office is very busy and that she very much wants to accommodate customers who come to her office for a variety of reasons and at all times of the week. She believes an appointed clerk is unlikely to keep such accommodating hours. Her sentiments relative to keeping the office an elected one is summarized in a quote from a Whitman newspaper a copy of which she submitted:

“We feel very strongly about keeping the voice of the people intact. People's rights are being taken away from them in small pieces everyday. Throughout our history lives have been lost trying to preserve this freedom and our right to vote. The ballot box is the only place left for citizens to make a choice. The issue is about keeping democracy alive.”

She also submitted her arguments for keeping the office elected in two papers attached to these minutes.

On March 29th both Hans Larsen and Michael Lombardo have indicated that they will come and talk about the practical issues relative to changes in the FoG.

At 9:15 Luther moved to adjourn. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 9:20

Respectfully submitted;

Holger Luther

Pros & Cons - Elected vs. Appointed Clerk

ELECTED

APPOINTED

PRO

PRO

Accountable to voters-not influenced by the politics of the day
Independent and autonomous-not beholden to anyone but the taxpayers
Make your own schedule-as many or as few **hours to do the job so that the office** runs as smoothly as possible
Voters can find at home 24/7-feel indebted to voters
Provides a good sense of the pulse of the community because you live there and have conducted meet & greet sessions with voters during campaign
Impartial and non-partisan
If not performing, then won't get re-elected

Technically challenging position- applicants can be screened and selected based on qualifications
Position is part of management team in decision making-not autonomous- **recognized as an integral part of senior management**
Position subject to performance review process and town-wide goal setting
Position part of Town compensation system-professionally classified with qualifications and job specifications enumerated
Individual required to maintain professional qualifications and technical skills, which is facilitated by management

CON

CON

On own fighting for salary, raises, benefits
Risk that someone will get elected based on personality or popularity, and could be under qualified or ill prepared for the position-voters subjective in their decision-making
Operates in isolation-not part of town's management team-considered autonomous
Only requirements are the individual be a resident and a registered voter-position too complex for such a low threshold
Voters are not in a position to effectively supervise & evaluate performance

Harder to get rid of low performer
The more positions that are removed from the electorate, the fewer voters will show up to vote for local elections Potential of "being directed" by Town Manager/Administrator or Selectmen to do something that is not in the best interest of the community

Top 10 Reasons Why Topsfield Should Elect a Town Clerk



- ~ 10 An elected Town Clerk must reside in the town and will, most likely, be more accommodating by making himself/herself available outside of office hours to notarize documents, accept marriage intentions, issue Vital Records, cast absentee ballots, post meetings, etc.
- ~ 9 An elected Town Clerk is less likely to pursue other job opportunities (thereby taking a wealth of institutional knowledge with him/her) outside of the community because of a sense of duty to his/her constituents.
- ~ 8 The Town Clerk is the only elected Department head in Topsfield
- ~ 7 The Office of the Town Clerk is a hybrid of Town and State responsibilities and functions less efficiently if run directly by either entity.
- ~ 6 The Chief Elections Official in a town should be elected to eliminate the perception of any conflict of interest, particularly with regards to local elections.
- ~ 5 Electing a Town Clerk ensures built-in checks and balances.
- ~ 4 As a town resident, an elected clerk is fully invested in the town for myriad reasons outside of his/her professional responsibilities.
- ~ 3 An elected Town Clerk is accountable directly to the people who elect him/her.
- ~ 2 The Town Clerk is the oldest Town Office in America. Before there were mayors, senators and presidents, there were Town Clerks. As a community steeped in history, Topsfield would be wise to continue the tradition of electing its Town Clerk.
- ~ 1 A community is better served having an elected official on site and readily available every day at Town Hall. Former Town Clerk Beverly Guarino addressed this issue well when she wrote "the Town Clerk is the communication spokesperson for and to the local citizenry. This office is the first door of government accessed by individuals seeking information and resolution to problems."