

Town of Topsfield
FY2019 Government Review Committee (GRC)

Meeting Minutes

January 22, 2019

7:30 P.M.

Topsfield Town Hall

First Floor Conference Room

1. **Call to Order:** Chairman Lou Ross called the meeting to order at 7:38 P.M. with Jon Palace, Roberta Sapienza and Libby Wilson present. Others present: Dick Gandt and Dave Larson. Dick Gandt made a recording of the meeting. Dave Read arrived mid-meeting.
2. **Minutes:** Roberta Sapienza made a motion to accept the minutes from January 17. Libby Wilson seconded the motion. Voted in favor 4-0-1.
3. **Discussion on Questions and Interviews with Town Board Members and Officials:**
 - a. Libby Wilson met with Liz Mulholland (Historical Commission). She has some suggestions for improvements, including an application process involving the building inspector. She does not interact much with other boards. Liz says "Decisions by consensus" is a good approach for town government. Libby will next interview chairs of Zoning (Bob Moriarty) and Assessors (Lynn Conant).
 - b. Jon Palace met with Steve Whelan (Moderator) and Rob Hardy (Alcohol Advisory Committee). He will soon meet with chair of Commissioners of Trust Funds (David Strachan).
 - c. Roberta Sapienza met with Cheryl Jolley (Conservation Commission), Kathleen Hunt (Cultural Council), and Penny Rogers (Council on Aging). They all felt that elected positions should remain elected, and appointed positions should remain appointed. They shared thoughts about making work easier by adding staff, e.g., an IT person. Some interviewees are in favor of extending term limits, feeling experience made a big difference. Roberta shared some thoughts from Martha Morrison (Planning Board): (i) the Planning Board needs professional staff, perhaps shared with other boards; (ii) leaders of the Planning Board and ZBA will eventually retire, and it takes a long time to get someone up-to-speed.
 - d. Lou Ross met with Karen Dow (Finance Committee) and Phil Knowles (Road Commissioners and Water Commissioners). Both recognized the value of having elected and appointed positions.
 - e. Discussion about a possible 'working session' with the Selectman. Chairman Lou Ross will check-in with the Chair of the BOS.
 - f. Dave Read interviewed Joe Geller (Rail Trail Committee) and will soon interview Dick Cullinan (Housing Authority).

4. **Investigating Town Governance Effectiveness and Efficiency:**
 - a. General discussion about a possible “Planning Department,” which exists in some towns. Libby has heard of a desire for one person to take care of buildings maintenance for the town. Dick Gandt observed that each department in Topsfield currently handles building maintenance in different ways. Lou Ross observed some efficiencies could be gained by having a centralized Department of Public Works. Roberta thought a consolidated DPW might make sense but thought it was important to retain expertise. Given that some department heads may soon retire, this may be an opportune time to make changes.
 - b. Roberta suggested we capture ideas/suggestions we hear (e.g., “We need help with IT”) and include these in our report, even if they are not part of our recommendation.
 - c. General discussion about effectiveness of the interview questions, and the possibility of using the online “Survey Monkey” tool to solicit more answers from more people. Committee members agreed if we use Survey Monkey, we prefer to require names (and not allow anonymity).
 - d. Roberta Sapienza said one board (COA) wanted to be an advisory board (working on policy), not a supervisory board.
 - e. Lou Ross wondered if we should suggest staggered terms so we don’t lose a lot of institutional knowledge all at once.
 - f. General discussion about “what’s next” for the GRC. We are wrapping-up our first set of interviews. To be discussed at our next meetings. Libby Wilson will interview someone from the Elementary School Committee. Jon Palace will share a blank Excel document which may be used to consolidate interview answers.
5. **Correspondence and Materials.** No correspondence. When emailing each other, we should cc lross@topsfield-ma.gov for public records purposes.
6. **Upcoming Meeting Schedule:** The GRC will try to meet on Tuesday 2/5 at 7 pm. Neither Jon Palace nor Dave Read will be able to attend. The GRC will try to meet again on Tuesday 2/12 at 7:30 pm
7. **Other Topics:** Dave Larson said expertise on committees is important. Current board members can sometimes recruit and mentor someone new. An associate (non-voting) board member could help with training.
8. **Adjourn:** A motion to adjourn was made by Jon Palace at 8:55 p.m. Seconded by Libby Wilson. Voted in favor 5-0.

Materials used at the meeting:

1. Agenda