

**Town of Topsfield**  
**FY2019 Government Review Committee (GRC)**

**Meeting Minutes**

April 9 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 7:30 P.M. with Jon Palace, Dave Read, and Libby Wilson present. David Larson was also present. (Roberta Sapienza did not attend.)
2. **Minutes:** (a) Libby Wilson moved to accept the minutes from the March 5, 2019 meeting. Dave Read seconded. Approved 4-0. (b) Libby Wilson moved to accept the minutes from the March 19, 2019 meeting. Dave Read seconded. Approved 4-0.
3. **Discussion on Compiled Responses to Questions with Town Board Members and Officials, and Investigating Town Governance Effectiveness and Efficiency**
  - a. General discussion about interview responses.
    - i. Most interviewees appear satisfied with town structure.
    - ii. Board of Selectmen prefers GRC to study town government and appears not for Board of Selectmen to influence the process.
    - iii. Not sure whether there is value in doing more interviews, though some committee members would like to hear current and prior Selectmen's opinions.
    - iv. The GRC should aim to complete its work this calendar year to give Selectmen time to do consider GRC's recommendations and act at Town Meeting in 2020 if desired.
    - v. Brief discussion of the "roadmap" to complete our work. Consensus was to review current data, determine if we need more data, and look for deeper insights.
    - vi. Brief discussion about a possible Department of Public Works. Advantages may include economies of scale, professional oversight rather than volunteer board; and timing might be right given imminent departures by Dave Bond and Steve Shepard. Possible disadvantage: A superintendent of DPW might be costly. The GRC might want to look at comparables (e.g., number of government employees per 1,000 residents; average salaries of any roles recommended by the GRC).
  - b. In depth-discussion of answers to question 26 ("What advantages and what disadvantages do you anticipate if our Town government were to be more centrally organized such that the functions or authority of boards or departments

were to be transferred to or overseen by the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator?”)

- i. 12 respondents did not voice a preference
    - ii. 4 respondents voiced a preference for a strong Town Administrator
    - iii. 3 respondents voiced a preference for not a strong Town Administrator
  - c. Lou Ross will draft a short statement to be shared at Town Meeting about the GRC’s work.
  - d. Lou Ross would like to “pare down” the document containing all responses from interviewees so each question (and responses) fit on one page, if possible. Jon Palace volunteered to work on responses from the Board of Health.
  - e. At the next GRC meeting, we may analyze answers to question 25 in greater depth (“What advantages, and what disadvantages, do you anticipate if our Town government were to be a more centralized or less centralized form of government generally?”).
4. **Correspondence and Materials.** (a) No correspondence. (b) The GRC reviewed a two-page document “GRC Summary of Responses” drafted by Jon Palace.
5. **Upcoming Meeting Schedule:** Tuesday, April 23, 2019.
6. **Comments from David Larson:** (a) The GRC might want to look at efficiencies / cost savings. (b) Town Treasurer Barbara Michalowski is leaving this summer.
7. **Adjourn:** A motion to adjourn was made by Libby Wilson at 9:35 p.m. Seconded by Jon Palace. Voted in favor 4-0.

**Materials used at the meeting:**

1. Agenda
2. GRC Summary of Responses