

ASHLAND CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 27, 2016

Ashland Town Hall – Room A

Members present: Alexis Christopher (Alexis), Secretary Betsy Emberley (Betsy), Steve Greenberg (Steve), KG Narayana (KG), Joe Magnani (Joe), Chair Roberta Soolman (Roberta)

Members absent: Ken Rush (Ken)

Guests: Jim Adams (Jim), Superintendent of Schools, Greg Enos (Greg) Human Resources Director, Susan Robie (Susan) Executive Assistant to the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager

Call to order: 8:32 am

1. Welcome and Introductions

Roberta welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. She reminded the committee that today's guests were Jim Adams, followed by Greg Enos who is followed by Susan Robie.

2. Input from Town Staff – Jim Adams

- a. Jim Adams has read our charter, and read through other town charters for comparable towns such as Medway and Holliston, which are similar in that they have five elected School Committee members.
- b. He feels the School Committee works well. Each member is very different and together they provide a diversity which is good for the town and good for him.
- c. Per Massachusetts General Law, they must have a public hearing before posting a budget. They typically do their budget before February break or in early March, then they provide the number to the Town Manager, and post a detailed budget online before the public hearing.
- d. He stated that it's harder to get people to run for office, and he thinks 5 is a good number of members; 3 is too few and 7 is too many.
- e. Roberta asked about his thoughts regarding the recall provision in the Charter. Jim stated he's not concerned with the recall provision. He stated that dysfunction isn't always helped by a recall and cited past dysfunction on the School Committee as an example that wouldn't have been helped by a recall.
- f. Jim said he believes in public input and in elected boards. KG asked why Jim thinks there is difficulty in getting people to run for School Committee. He answered that it's much more work than people think it is, there is more perceived grief than satisfaction, and a lot of people get involved to address a specific personal concern and are unhappy with slow or no change. He stated that the average life span for a school superintendent is 3 years, and it's affected by School Committee turnover. He likes having staggered terms.

- g. Roberta brought up that the timing of the budget and warrant articles has been discussed by others in previous meetings. Jim stated he goes by Massachusetts General Law and is done with the school budget by early March. The only time this may not be true is if the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committee need to balance the budget due to changing costs or cost increases such as Special Education which impact the budget unexpectedly. The timeframe works for them, and they always have three budgets going at once. Right now, they're closing out FY 2016, operating under FY 2017 and working on FY 2018.
- h. Roberta asked if Jim saw challenges in the next five years that the Charter could address. Jim responded that he did not. He said that the school challenges have to do with closing the achievement gaps for English Language Learners and Special Education, both of which significantly impact the budget, and the mental, social and emotional well-being of the students. The budget process is defined in the Charter and works well. The resources are allocated well due to the financial policy of the Tri-Board (School Committee, Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee). The Charter won't impact federal and state mandates or either of the challenges stated above.
- i. Roberta pointed out the Human Resources System section (6-2) impacts all town departments except the schools. He thinks it should stay that way because the hours, hiring practices, state mandated evaluations and regulations, and the Mass. Teachers Retirement System relevant to the schools are very different than what occurs in other town departments. Schools have hiring committees which include parents and educators, and they have an evaluation process dictated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations and Massachusetts General Law. If they don't comply, they lose funding. School staff contribute to the Mass. Teachers' Retirement System and the Town of Ashland doesn't contribute to retirement for school department teachers or administrators. Cafeteria workers and some school department employees do participate in the town's retirement. Jim said it depends on what the vision of the town is for Human Resources. He would need a more clearly defined question to answer thoroughly. He said that the Assistant Supt.'s department handles human resources for the schools. He said the human resources system may be useful to the schools if it's just "tracking" employees.
- j. Jim was asked if the Tri-Board or Liaison meetings should be mandated in the Charter. He did not believe the Charter should be prescriptive and require them. He said he believes in encouraging communication, openness and input.

Greg Enos

- a. Greg Enos looked at the Charter, and believes the Human Management system section should be kept generic. It includes the standard elements of a human resource system. He sees his role as more advisory to the Town Manager, and he has no hiring or firing authority. He and the Town Manager are setting up and revising the policies, but he has no authority to approve them. Human resource policies are approved by the Town Manager and the Board of Selectmen.
- b. Steve asked about recommended changes. Greg said everything in there is fairly standard and is not sure changing the language regarding the policies would be helpful because the policies

could change in the next two years. He suggested that the term “system” could be changed to “policies and procedures”.

- c. KG asked Greg if he foresees the need to have hiring and firing authority. Greg responded that he sees his role as one to make recommendations and to help ensure processes and decisions are following the letter of the law. His focus is to attract, obtain, recruit, train and retain permanent, paid employees.
- d. Greg said he is planning trainings for supervisory staff on conducting performance evaluations, sexual harassment and discrimination.
- e. There was discussion about his role in dealing with volunteers serving in an elected or appointed capacity. He clarified that volunteers are “special municipal employees” under state law and not the same as paid employees. He stated that, once an appointment is made, his role is to be sure the volunteer has received the relevant policies and procedures, and has signed a receipt.
- f. Roberta suggested requiring training for elected and appointed board/committee members. Discussion ensued about sources of training and training options. Greg thought that making it mandatory that board/committee members have minimum initial training and annual training was an excellent idea. Right now, the School Committee and Board of Assessors have mandatory trainings.
- g. There was also discussion about establishing a more formal vetting process for making appointments.

Susan Robie

- a. Susan Robie finds one of the biggest drivers for her as an employee is how the staff interacts with boards and committees, and finding the best way to utilize staff resources to support the boards. Sometimes it's difficult to know that the boards are working toward the same common goal, but she doesn't know what could be changed in the Charter to guide that more effectively. She suggests we look at what the employees can do to help the boards and committees.
- b. Steve asked about elected vs. appointed officials. Susan responded that candidates deserve credit for running for office. However, it's more challenging if a person who's elected is not a good fit on the elected board. Susan suggested that if an appointment is not a good fit, it can be addressed by the appointing authority. Joe explained that the Board of Selectmen can extend an appointment, but there isn't really a process for removing someone before their term expires. She thought the Charter should give the appointing authority the right to unappoint; however, she cautioned that it can be unfair if members of the appointing authority have a bias toward anyone, and we have to be careful how much power we give to one group.
- c. Joe asked how the Charter affects her position. Susan said she's just back from vacation and will review it more thoroughly and send a thoughtful follow up, but that certainly she has referred to the Charter in her work and used it as a guide.

- d. Susan said she believes if you change the form of government you take away the opportunity for people to participate, have buy-in and be part of the solution. She suggested meeting people in different environments in town as a way to increase resident involvement.
- e. She did not recommend that there be a restriction on the number of different committees someone can serve on, especially if the committee exists “to completion” of a task or the individual has particular expertise which are needed.
- f. She does not think Finance Committee members should serve on other committees so they can retain their independence in making decisions.
- g. Susan said that residents should be permitted to serve regardless of whether they're registered voters. Regarding having town employees on committees, she thought that was all right as an expert to the committee, and she applauds those who want to serve. She stated that she personally doesn't serve on a committee because she wants to be seen as a resident and not as an employee.
- h. To help recruit volunteers, she would like to see descriptions of each committee on the website which include the responsibilities of the committee and the time commitment in terms of duration and frequency of meetings. She stated that saying we have vacancies is not enough.
- i. In response to a question about the town's future challenges, Susan stated that the financial ups and downs are a challenge, that the town has made changes which have resulted in financial efficiencies but that there will come a point where they can't find the money they need through budget cuts alone. She was concerned about how the town will sustain what we have.
- j. Regarding the Town Moderator term, she thought it should be 2 years instead of one.

4. Next Meeting: The committee will meet on July 29th at 8:30 am. with other staff.

KG moved, Steve seconded and the committee voted 6-0-0 to adjourn at 11:15 am

Submitted by,
Betsey Emberley, Secretary

Please note: these minutes are a representation of the actions and discussion at the Charter Review Committee meeting and are not a verbatim transcript.