

ASHLAND CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 29, 2016

Ashland Town Hall – Room A

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

Members absent: Alexis Christopher (Alexis), Steve Greenberg (Steve), Ken Rush (Ken)

Guests: Barbara Durand (Barbara), Ashland Public Schools Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations; Nat Strosberg (Nat), Town Planner and Director of Community Development

Call to order: 8:42 a.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Roberta welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending.

2. Input from Town Staff – Barbara Durand

- a. Barbara Durand said things in Ashland are going well due to stronger collaboration over the years and policies that have been put in place. She said there's a great working relationship between school administration and the Town Manager's office.
- b. She wasn't sure if the Charter Review Committee is looking at consolidating services. The facilities consolidation has been a little bumpy in terms of oversight of the facilities director by her and the past and present Town Managers due to mixed messages. There needs to be a clear understanding between people who supervise the same person.
- c. Joe said that a discussion needs to occur before a consolidation is implemented. Barbara explained how IT was merged and said the process was different than how Facilities was merged. When merging IT, there were some unexpected glitches because they did not anticipate some benefit changes for employees who were switched from the school budget to the government side. Responsibility for field maintenance has changed several times (e.g., the field management committee to DPW and the schools) and it has been difficult.
- d. Barbara feels the legislative boards (e.g., Board of Selectmen and School Committee) should be elected, but the town clerk, town accountant and key department heads should be appointed due to the need for continuity, special knowledge and expertise.

Nat Strosberg

- a. Nat Strosberg explained his role as providing information and guidance to his multiple reports: the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Selectmen and Town Manager. He provides them with research he has done and information and opinions provided by others. He

is diligent about identifying the source of the information and whose opinion he is communicating at a given time. He said he advocates for what he believes is best.

- b. He said it's important to balance the priorities when these boards are heading in different directions. At the moment, they all understand the complexities of his having multiple reports and they treat him with respect. However, over time with turnover, one or more of the boards might not be sensitive to potential tensions or conflicts in priorities or policies. When the board dynamic shifts, the Town Manager can offer support to him and visa versa.
- c. He did not think that any structural changes were needed, nor was he sure there were any safeguards that could be added to the Charter to guard against difficulties that might arise if there are conflicts in direction and priorities among everyone involved. Joe asked if it could help if the Human Resources Director was a mediator. It was discussed that the HR Director would need the authority to be a mediator. An alternative might be a commission with the HR Director and others (not the Town Manager or Assistant Town Manager). The committee will check with Greg Enos to see if there is currently a mediation or grievance process in place.

3. Other Business

- a. Roberta informed the committee that a request for eleven sets of minutes, including the minutes for this 7/29/16 meeting, has been made by a resident.
- b. Motion was made by Joe, seconded by KG and voted 4-0-0 to extend the online resident survey deadline to August 31.

4. Next Meeting: August 2nd at 7 pm.

KG made, Joe seconded and the committee voted 4-0-0 to adjourn at 9:58 a.m.

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