

ASHLAND CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

August 23rd, 2016

Ashland Town Hall – Room A

Members present: Chairman Roberta Soolman (Roberta), KG Narayana (KG), Steve Greenberg (Steve), Alexis Christopher (Alexis)

Members absent: Vice Chairman Ken Rush (Ken), Joe Magnani (Joe), Betsy Emberley (Betsy)

Guest: Brittany Iacaponi (Brittany) Ashland Finance Director and Town Accountant

Resident: Judy Margulies (Judy)

Call to order: 9:00 a.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions: Roberta welcomed everyone and announced that Judy planned to audio tape the meeting if no one objects – no objections raised. She indicated why three (3) members of the committee were not present and then explained to Brittany the purpose of the interview process and with whom we had previously met.

2. Interview with Brittany Iacaponi: Brittany indicated that she had comments and /or suggestions on specific sections of the current Charter that relate to her role.

Section 3-4 (b) Brittany suggested that after “The town moderator” add the phrase “after consultation with the Finance Committee”. This triggered the discussion on how the current Finance Committee (FINCOM) is appointed. The Charter could be changed here to include “the Moderator as well as the Chair of the Board of Selectmen and the Chair of the FINCOM in the deliberation of new FINCOM members”. On the other hand, Brittany indicated that the moderator is elected so the townspeople have faith on his/her decisions.

Section 5-6 (e) Brittany indicated that Town Manager really oversees versus being responsible for the actual work.

Section 5-6 (i) Brittany indicated the same comment as in 5-6 (e).

Section 5-6(j) Brittany indicated that there should be a minimum number of yearly updates and some indication as to the format. She suggested that quarterly may be appropriate.

At this time, Brittany indicated that having two (2) Town Meetings (Annual and Special) does not add a burden to her job.

Section 7-1 Brittany indicated that it would be nice if she had actual dates and not the number of days. During the discussion, a question came up as to where the number of days came from (e.g., Ashland Charter or MGL). Also, when indicating number of days, the Charter should state whether it's referring to business or calendar days. Brittany also indicated that the 105 days is reasonable.

Section 7-1(a) Brittany indicated that the last sentence should be more explicit with respect to "material changes" and should be changed to "material changes of 15% or more of any department".

Section 7-1(b) Brittany indicated that she didn't know if this statement made sense but at least change "general guidelines" to "policy guidelines".

At this point, there was a discussion on how the School Department budget is received and reviewed. Brittany indicated that the School Committee posted their entire detailed budget to their website. If the School budget doesn't align with available funds, she, the town manager and FINCOM get together with the School Committee to negotiate a consensus agreement.

Section 7-1(e) Brittany requested that we change "additions or deletions" to read "additions or deferred" in second sentence. There was some discussion on whether this was for Capital projects only or to include Town services.

Section 7-1(f) Brittany had a question as to whether seven (7) days was enough time. It was agreed that this would depend upon the reader and that the average individual may need more time. Brittany did indicate that a draft budget should not be made available for review as it would/could cause problems and confusion with multiple versions. We may need to consider changing to fourteen (14) days.

Section 7-2 There was some discussion on whether it was necessary to have the FINCOM review the Capital Improvement Program and that it may be a repetitive process. Also, in the second to the last sentence, the FINCOM does not submit a budget. They review and make recommendations on the budget they have been given. There was a question as to how the fourteen (14) days here relates back to the seven (7) days in 7-1(c). It was noted here that the FINCOM does not review the budgets for any of the Enterprise Funds.

Section 7-3 Brittany indicated that this section needed revisions, and we needed to review what the consultants were working on.

Section 7-4 Brittany indicated that this section should refer to the Town Accountant since that position approves that the town has the funds to pay for the Warrant (in this instance, warrant means an invoice, not a warrant article).

The discussion turned to what would make Brittany's job better. Her answer was more staff, either a financial analyst or budget analyst. She said things are getting done but they could be better. Additional staff would give her more time to work on overview policies and practices.

The discussion continued to the question of FINCOM members being allowed to sit on other town committees. Brittany did not have any input either way.

The discussion then moved on to town committees who indirectly have a budget through town departments and what is the process/procedural step for the approval of expenditures. This process does not seem to be handled consistently across those committees.

At this point, Judy asked to be heard. She indicated that she had stopped recording since she was mainly interested in what we had covered earlier. She asked how elected boards/committees stay independent when they don't have budget control. Specifically, the Board of Health was presented a complete budget by the Health Agent on Jan 26, 2016 and they were not given the time necessary to understand or vote on the budget. She asked how budgets are prepared and managed for the Planning Board. Brittany indicated that the department heads prepare the budget and are responsible for tracking to the budget. Judy then asked how the Board of Health makes sure it has the budget to meet its requirements without being part of the budget process. Alexis indicated that she had watched Planning Board meetings where the Town Planner brought invoices to that Planning Board for approval and signatures. There are definitely inconsistencies across departments.

7-1 Brittany went back to this section to indicate that Enterprise funds (Water/Sewage/Trash/Fields) need to be addressed since the Board of Selectmen are responsible for their operating budgets. Steve indicated that a matrix would be nice to have to provide more information about how the Enterprise Funds operate.

At 9:56 a.m., Brittany left.

3. Reschedule individual meetings: Roberta will contact Adam Shuster to reschedule shortly. Mark Oram contacted Roberta that he is available 8/30, 8/31 and 9/1. Turns out that from the four (4) of us, Roberta can't guarantee a quorum, so she will contact Betsy, Joe and Ken to determine with our responses which day there will be a quorum.

4. Approval of minutes from August 22, 2016: KG moved, Steve seconded, the motion to approve these minutes with minor changes addressed. Vote: 4-0-0

5. Other business: Based on the input from the various committee members, Roberta indicated that the four (4) potential meeting dates with Michael Ward when at least 5 committee members would be available are:

1. Wednesday, September 7, 2016
2. Monday, September 12, 2016

3. Thursday, September 15, 2016
4. Monday, September 19, 2016

Roberta will contact Michael Ward with these dates and will let the committee know which date is available on his schedule. This will be our next meeting unless she is able to schedule Adam Shuster earlier.

Adjourn: KG moved, Steve seconded, motion passed 4-0-0 to adjourn at 10:13 am.

Respectfully submitted by
Alexis Christopher

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