

TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

The Committee was reestablished eight years ago in November 2011 by the then Board of Selectmen and reconstituted by vote of the October 28, 2013 Town Meeting with five appointments by the Moderator and four appointments by the Board of Selectmen. The Committee has conducted a number of studies of town governance and operations and successfully recommended a number of improvements or changes that have been approved by Town Meeting and the voters and implemented. In some cases, we have not supported or recommended changes if we couldn't determine that there would be a material benefit.

Initially, we were asked to review whether the town meeting form of government was the right choice for Milton. Our conclusion was that the representative town meeting structure was one that was still appropriate and functional for Milton. However, the Committee did recommend several changes to improve the Town Meeting efficiency and experience and retention of members. Moderators Brian Walsh and Robert Hiss have done an excellent job implementing and adding to these recommendations.

It became apparent early on that it would be helpful to have another set of eyes from outside Milton to look at how Milton operates. The Committee recommended and the Select Board and School Committee agreed to request that the Commonwealth's Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services (DOR) conduct a review. The DOR has provided reviews of over two hundred and fifty towns over the past thirty plus years enabling towns to learn about the "best practices" and process improvements employed by our neighboring towns as well as beneficial organizational or governance changes. The DOR review completed in 2013 with thirty-three recommendations became the basis for a number of our recommendations and we would recommend that the Select Board and Town Administrator continue to refer to the report going forward.

Two major recommendations by the Town Government Study Committee, that were successfully implemented with the approval of Town Meeting and the state legislature, have been the increase in the size of the Select Board from three to five members and the strengthening of the Town Administrator's position. Together these two recommendations have shifted day to day management duties from the Board to the Town Administrator and enabled the Board to focus on policy issues and strategic planning.

An important recommendation that has been implemented was to strengthen the Town's Audit Committee by clarifying its role and responsibilities and ensuring its independence through the creation of a bylaw. Our recommendation included having the Audit Committee provide a verbal report annually at Town Meeting to insure greater transparency in town government.

Another area of town government that needed addressing was the decentralized procurement systems or processes used by Town Departments. The Committee was successful in securing the establishment of a new bylaw, Chapter 24, creating a Chief Procurement Officer with authority over all town departments and compliance with the Commonwealth's Uniform Procurement Act, Chapter 30B. The Town should be benefitting with purchasing savings through the centralization of purchasing utilizing an experienced purchasing professional.

The Committee also reviewed and successfully made recommendations to Chapter 13, the bylaw governing the Town's personnel administration. This recommendation was needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Personnel Board with the strengthened Town Administrator position and to make the existing bylaw consistent with today's Human Resource (HR) best practices. The Committee contacted a number of peer communities to analyze the different roles of personnel boards and changes in human resource administration.

We also recommended and Town Meeting agreed that an IT committee be reestablished for the purpose of preparing a town wide IT strategic plan, assist town departments and boards in evaluating IT plans and funding requests, making recommendations on software systems and prioritize IT projects.

Among the recommendations of the Committee that have been approved by Town Meeting and implemented has been the establishment of a committee to review and rewrite the Town's bylaws; a Select Board committee to develop and implement a PILOT program for the town's non-profit institutions to provide regular payments in lieu of taxes; the funding of the postretirement benefits account OPEB on an ongoing basis to address a long term liability; and a change in the definition of a "quorum" to be based upon the actual number of a committee's members instead of the authorized number of members.

There is one recommendation by the Committee that was defeated at Town Meeting in 2014 but is on the agenda for the December 2 Town Meeting. This recommendation calls for the addition of an associate member to the Planning Board to assist on special permit applications in cases where a regular Planning Board member misses more than one special permit meeting or has a conflict. The Planning Board was opposed in 2014, but is now in support and is sponsoring the article.

The final major subject of our review was the financial management structure of the Town. The Department of Revenue study identified our financial management and operations to be very fragmented and decentralized, unlike most other towns of our size in the Commonwealth. Our Committee partially addressed that by incorporating financial and budgetary leadership responsibilities into the Town Administrator job description. In addition, the Committee agreed with the Department of Revenue recommendation and the actions of more than 80% of the comparable towns in Massachusetts to convert the elected Treasurer position to an appointed position. This would enable cash and investment management functions bonding and debt service and tax collection to be included in a centralized finance department reporting to the Town Administrator or a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The TGSC's recommendation for a centralized financial management structure was approved at Town Meeting in October 2018, but the ballot question to convert the elected Treasurer position to appointed was not approved by the voters in the April 2019 Town election.

Without the Treasurer on the finance team, the Town's financial management continues to be fragmented and not efficient. It is impractical to hire a CFO in the Assistant Town Administrator position without the Treasurer and the associated functions included. If the Town never fills a CFO or Director of Finance position, the Treasurer's position should still be appointed by and report to the Town Administrator acting as the defacto CFO. The Town Government Study Committee strongly urges the Select Board to place the Treasurer ballot question on the ballot for the April 2020 annual election and to support its passage. It is not uncommon for towns to place an appointed Treasurer ballot question on the ballot several times prior to its passage.

We thank all Town Departments and their staff for their cooperation and assistance—in particular, we thank the Select Board’s administrative staff for its support over the last eight years and we thank former Town Counsel John Flynn for his responsiveness and thoroughness to our frequent queries and need for legal drafting. Finally, we would like to thank all former Committee members for their service to the Town. They include: Leroy Walker, Edward Hayes, Philip Mathews, Robert Hiss, Mary McNamara, Kathleen Conlon, Annemarie Fagan, Robert Gatnik, Michael Joyce, and Ewan Innes.

Respectfully submitted,

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