

Minutes Town Council Study Committee
January 10, 2024

1. The scheduled meeting on January 10 was held in Meeting Trailer "B" from 3:10 p.m. to 4:35 p.m. Attending in person were Joe Grause, Chair; Tom Dixon, Select Board; Jill Vieth, Finance Committee; elected members Caroline Baltzer, Jeff Carlson, Beau Barber, Curtis Barnes. Participating by Zoom were Rachel Mandle and ACNVT representatives Donna Martino and Pamela Suan.
2. Minutes of the December 20, 2023, were approved as corrected: both Tom Dixon from the Select Board, and Jill Vieth from FinCom are voting members of the committee. Donna Martino from ACNVT is a non-voting member.
3. Chairman Joe Grause reviewed some housekeeping details:
 - a. Calendar and potential meeting dates? Possible alternate dates if committee members have conflicts.
 - b. Possible outside speakers? Joe and Jeff Carlson to follow up.
 - c. Joe will try to schedule Michael Dutton, Town Manager of Bridgewater, for the January 24 meeting via Zoom.
 - d. Town Manager Libby Gibson reminded the Committee that Nantucket is unusual that it is both a Town and a County, which affects a possible Charter change.
 - e. Ms. Gibson will discuss the current Town Charter at a future meeting – possibly with Town Counsel John Giorgio participating.
 - f. Jeff Carlson will reach out to the Collins Center at UMass. Service/consultation is available at different levels. Depending on the Committee's request, some funding may be required for Collins Center services.
4. Joe emphasized that there are three significant parts to the study/review process:
 - a. 1/3 extensive education on options
 - b. 1/3 compose an appropriate charter proposal.
 - c. 1/3 comprehensive outreach to voters about options and proposed changes
5. Comments from Committee members:
 - a. Jill – we need public input.
 - b. Caroline – we need to reach out; inspire public trust.
 - c. Curtis – John Giorgio/KP Law can be an important resource; they are familiar with a variety of Town Charters
 - d. Jeff – need to reach out; go to the people; consider an online survey; easier participation.
 - e. Joe – importance of weekly updates
 - f. Jill – need information on voter registration.
 - g. Donna – survey and outreach should run concurrently.
 - h. Tom – survey should be conducted by a professional to eliminate possible bias.
 - i. Jeff – comments emphasize the need to use an outside facilitator.
 - j. Joe – what is the problem? what are we trying to fix? currently Annual Town Meeting does not have great representation.

- k. Caroline – serving as a Town Councilor is lots of work; cumbersome; there are many different reasons for serving in Town government; what is appropriate compensation for service?
 - l. Beau – emphasized the importance of checks and balances in government; Annual Town Meeting regulars see it as “traditional” direct democracy; they feel they can “speak.”
 - m. Tom – it is important to have access to the Town governing board; people want participation; ability to discuss “problems”; there is “complexity” in the current process.
 - n. Caroline – Town Meeting gives each person “power” to speak out.
 - o. Donna – ATM is an “archaic” form of government; we should be trying to bring it up to date; more efficient; more responsive.
 - p. Pamela – we need to reach out to broader groups.
6. Discussion on “What are the problems with Town Meeting?”
- a. Electorate is not well represented. Typical attendance (of 700-900 voters) is roughly 10% of the Island’s total voters. Despite trying weekend and weeknight meetings over the years it is rare to have over 1000 voters at Town Meeting. Clearly many voters cannot afford the time to participate in Town Meeting.
 - b. There is a 4X gap between Town Meeting attendees and the turnout for town elections. Citizens can find time to vote, but not have the time for Town Meeting.
 - c. Town Meetings are too infrequent, with one or two Town Meeting a year. The process is slow and acting on time sensitive issues can be difficult.
 - d. Large percentages of voters are poorly prepared for a Town Meeting. Much of the debate/discussion at Town Meeting is the result of confusion and/or ignorance about various warrant articles. This tends to shift influence to an even smaller group of interested/passionate voters.
 - e. The Warrant is long, dense, and often difficult to read. Issues coming before Town Meeting are often complicated. There are usually a large number of Articles in the Warrant (generally over 100) making it difficult for voters to study and grasp all of the issues.
 - f. The Town faces many complicated issues that are very difficult to explain and/or debate on Town Meeting floor. This can bog down the meeting or result in important decisions voted down and “kicked down the road”.
 - g. A percentage of Town Meeting attendees are skeptical about Town Administration and various expert bodies (Planning Board, FinCom, etc.)
7. Discussion on “What do voters like about Town Meeting?”:
- a. Perception that Town Meeting is “direct democracy”, giving individuals an opportunity to comment and vote on issues affecting them and the Town.
 - b. Emotionally attached to Town Meeting. Part of Town’s history.
 - c. For some active Town Meeting participants, it is a chance to be influential.
 - d. For those skeptical of Administration/government it may be an opportunity to slow down or stop issues they oppose.
8. Hillary Rayport – on Zoom – commented that she is “for Town Meeting”; suggests that a Town Council is subject to “pressure” and is “highly political”; focus should be on output.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Curtis Barnes
1/18/24

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