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Minutes of the Town Council Study Committee Meeting

Date: Wednesday, October 2nd, 2024

Attendees:

- Joe Grause, Chair
- Caroline Baltzer
- Jeff Carlson
- Beau Barber
- Curtis Barnes
- Rachel Mandle
- Thomas Dixon
- Donna Martino
- Melvin Kleckner
- Anthony Wilson
- Patricia J Lloyd

I. Introduction and Roll Call (0:03 - 1:09)

- Chair Joe Grause called the meeting to order and confirmed attendance.
- Members introduced themselves.

II. Approval of Agenda and Minutes (1:09 - 3:20)

- The committee approved the meeting agenda.
- The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

III. Discussion of Upcoming Public Forums (3:20 - 14:23)

- The committee discussed plans for two public forums.
- Logistics, format, and encouraging public participation were addressed.
- Decisions:
 - Forums will have an open microphone for public input.
 - Written questions will be accepted.
 - Potential for small group discussions.

IV. Electronic Communication (14:23 - 15:51)

- The committee discussed setting up an email account for public feedback.

V. Additional Discussion (15:51 - 16:30)

- Donna suggested compiling questions and answers from the public forums and posting them on the committee's web page.
- Publishing a follow-up notice in local news outlets (Inky and wire services) summarizing the events was discussed.

Action Items:

1. Jeff Carlsen will confirm email account setup the Town's IT Department.

Next Steps:

1. Hold two public forums (Oct 5th and 10th) to gather input from residents.
2. Publish a follow-up notice in local news outlets.

Discussion of Zoning Changes (30:06 - 45:33)

- Anthony explained the process for submitting and approving zoning changes.
- Key points:
 - 14-day submission period to the planning board.
 - Planning board has 65 days to conduct a public hearing.
 - City council or town meeting must act within 90 days or 6 months, respectively.
 - Failure to act results in automatic rejection.
- Discussion highlighted differences between town meeting and city council processes.
- Committee members clarified that:
 - Voting requirements vary depending on the proposal type.
 - Two-thirds majority may be required for certain zoning changes.
 - Planning board recommendations require a simple majority vote.

Key Takeaways:

1. The zoning change process remains largely the same under both town meeting and city council structures.
2. Time frames for each step may differ.
3. Executive functions shift from the select board to the town council.

Committee Comments and Concerns:

- Joe noted that the process seems similar, with some differences in time frames.
- Mel emphasized that town meeting approval is replaced by town council approval.
- Rachel expressed concern that the town council structure reduces public involvement.

Action Items:

None specified.

Next Steps:

1. Prepare for public forums to address zoning change questions and concerns.
2. Clarify voting requirements and process details.

Discussion of Charter Development Timeline and Town Meeting Strategy (1:00:59 - 1:18:06)**Key Points:**

1. Committee prefers to maintain similarities with the current open town meeting structure.
2. Airport, Water Commission, and Sewer Commission may remain separate entities.
3. Water Committee is elected due to its Enterprise Fund status.
4. Sewer Commission's future is uncertain if the select board disappears.
5. Committee seeks clarity on department head appointments, employee management, and contracts.

Committee Comments and Concerns:

- Concerns about reducing public involvement in the town council structure.
- Uncertainty about the Sewer Commission's future.
- Preference for a special town meeting to focus on the Town Council article.

Action Items:

1. Schedule Town Manager Libby to discuss departmental relationships and administrative authority.
2. Arrange public forums to address zoning change questions and concerns.

Next Steps:

1. Review the work plan to determine the number of weeks needed to cover remaining topics.

2. Consider a special town meeting or a non-binding ballot measure to gauge public support.

Additional Notes:

- The committee discussed the select board's potential support for a warrant article.
- Differences in interpretation of the select board meeting outcomes were noted.
- A special town meeting may attract more focused attention and public engagement.

Discussion on Resident Participation and Public Access in the Town Charter

Summary:

1. **Introduction:** Patricia introduced the topic of resident participation and public access in the town charter.
2. **Resident Participation Options:** Patricia presented four options for resident participation:
 - Free Petition: Allows residents to collect signatures for a Town Council hearing.
 - Citizen Petition: Enables voters to collect signatures for special town meeting items.
 - Referendum: Allows residents to request a vote to overturn a Town Council proposal.
 - Town Hall/Open Meeting: Requires signatures for an open meeting discussion.
3. **Signature Thresholds:** Discussion on signature thresholds (5%-15% of registered voters) for each option.
4. **Recall Provisions:** Patricia explained recall provisions and varying requirements among towns.
5. **Definition of "Resident" vs. "Voter":** Discussion on expanding participation to non-voting residents.
6. **Public Access:** Patricia addressed public access concerns and representation for non-voting community members.

Action Items:

- Patricia to send documents, including the chart on other towns' participation methods.
- Clerk to provide the number of registered voters in [Town Name].

Motion to Adjourn: Approved.

Next Steps: Continue discussion on resident participation and public access at the next meeting.

Adjournment: [5:00 pm]

Respectfully submitted,

Beau Barber,

Secretary