

Dec 4, 2024 | Town Council Study Committee Meeting Minutes

Location: 131 Pleasant Street, Room B

Attendees: Beau Barber, Curtis Barnes, Caroline Baltzer, Jeff Carlson, Joe Grause, Rachel Mandle, Jill Vieth, Donna Martino, Kelly Steffen

Members of the Public: Jeremy Bloomer, Lucy Hehir

00:00 Jeff: Call to order

01:15 Majority: Motion to accept 12/4 agenda approved

01:40 Caroline: Amend 11/30 minutes to include Libby's comment about potentially giving too much appointment responsibility to the *Town Manager*.

01:56 Majority: Motion to adopt amended minutes approved.

03:37 Joe: As we are not likely on *ATM* in May but instead *Special ATM* in September or October, here are things we need to focus on,

1. Compose a report for the Select Board and draft the town and county charter.
2. We have funding for three or four more meetings with the Collins Center, so we need to determine if that is enough or if we will need more.
3. Come up with additional ideas for public outreach to keep our topic in front of voters.
4. Decide if we want to pursue non binding "Sense of" vote via town meeting or on the ballot?.

06:20 Curtis: Emphasizes the importance of being publicly active over the next eight/nine months by continuing to talk to organizations and writing *letters to the editor*. Is supportive of both formats for "Sense of the Meeting Vote".

07:01 Joe: Agrees with Curtis about the importance of planning and being active over the next eight/nine months. Additionally, it raises the idea of one or more public forums.

07:44 Caroline: Be aware of the Citizens Article related to town governance on the ATM Warrant.

08:46 Jeff: Getting "Sense of the Meeting Vote" in front of a *Town Meeting* is essential because of the people who attend.

09:08 Curtis: If "Sense of the Meeting Vote" at the *Town Meeting*, it should be in the beginning.

09:31 Caroline, Jeff & Curtis: It's a valuable educational opportunity.

10:38 Beau: Concerned about the implications of a "no" vote. Poses this question to Tom.

11:16 Tom: It's more data points, and I would not take it as an absolute answer but instead as one of the many data points.

12:50 Curtis: Agrees and thinks comparing a town meeting and a ballot vote would be interesting.

13:22 Jeff: Concerned about the confusion it could generate. Clarity around what the vote is for is imperative. Should it be Select Board sponsored or not? Thinks a ballot vote would show a broader diversity of opinions.

15:19 Joe: Supports a *Town Meeting* vote and is already expecting support to be low while the ballot vote as it's multiple times the turnout may show more support. However, these things depend on how well we continue outreach and advocacy. Maybe we can increase turnout.

18:06 Donna: Would a *Town Meeting* be an opportunity to distribute information as people walk in, or is that not allowed?

20:19 Jeremy (public comment): Two reasons to do this. The first is in those five minutes, you can educate and explain what we've done and why and then hear questions, criticism, and support. View this as an excellent opportunity to elicit the stated objections and to educate.

20:58 Jeff: What are the rules around a "Sense of the Meeting Vote"?

21:40 Jeremy (member of the public): Can we get the *Finance Committee* to give a recommendation?

22:49 Jill: Thinks a lot of people on the *Finance Committee* would endorse this, and it would allow more feedback

23:35 Joe: We will determine the rules and procedures for a "Sense of the Meeting Vote".

23:49 Jill: Present to *Finance Committee* soon, possibly before May.

24:19 Caroline: The other article regarding *ATM* complements the conversation about a *Town Council*, so having only one seems incomplete and may frustrate voters.

26:02 Jill: Things this big do not pass the first time, so having it pass sooner rather than later may involve the process of multiple and repeated articles being voted "no". Additionally, there are also considerable turnarounds in votes year to year.

26:48 Donna: We must talk to Sarah Alger and continue public outreach.

27:48 Joe: Will reach out to Sarah and ask all raised questions.

28:19 Jill: Reach out to other municipal boards and bodies.

29:16 Jeremy (public comment): Compensation for the council members should be market-oriented.

29:42 Joe & Jeff: Compensation discussion will be put on the agenda for the future.

29:54 Joe: We're going to have a meeting where we go back through and affirm the number of signatures and other count thresholds for multiple parts of the proposed charter.

30:29 Beau: Against a "Sense of the Meeting Vote" as a "no" vote implicates available funding for further TCSC work. So, this is one step that can go wrong. Additionally, I am concerned that we have not done enough outreach and that people could be unclear about what they vote on.

32:12 Rachel: Without a complete charter, people may hesitate to agree to any of it. Additionally, we could get a review by all appropriate bodies (legal, admin, finance committee). If none of this has happened, the feedback we get may not be helpful. Also, what if we cannot debate on the *Town Meeting* floor? Is that even helpful? Overall, without these initial steps, the "data" from the *Town Meeting* could not be beneficial. I'm not saying we shouldn't pursue a "Sense of the Meeting Vote". I'm concerned with its value, how the language is now, and where we're in our process.

36:26 Donna: Opportunity to reach people who we need to convince that *Town Council* is the way to go. We're presenting where we are. It's also essential to keep building consensus from meeting to meeting.

37:54 Tom: Outstanding questions. There's the process and outreach of the whole thing, and then there are the nuts and bolts of it, the details. We could ask John Giorgio or somebody from KP Law to come to one of our meetings and update us about their thoughts about where we're in the process and how much legal work would go into it.

39:25 Lucy (public comment): When we were collecting signatures at the Stop & Shop, very few people understood or knew what a *Town Council* was. We were also told flyers could be handed out 50 feet away from the ATM (the school).

40:10 Beau: It doesn't make sense and feels like a conflict exists to have the executive body's legal team look at the charter that may disassemble their own body.

41:23 Rachel: If we can do a "Sense of the Meeting Vote" as a check-in and be clear this is where we're at in the process and share the definitive next step(s) while getting feedback, I would be more supportive. Unsure if just getting a "yes" or "no" support vote without more information would be helpful. Getting the process and procedure information is very important.

42:30 Tom: While the language is borrowed from other characters in the Commonwealth, Nantucket has enough unique qualities that we need legal help to ensure the charter is formed correctly.

43:18 Joe: By the end of our three or four meetings with the Collins Center, we should have a complete Town and County Charter set. Thinks the necessary legal work may be less than expected. Feels that if we bypass our various *Town Meeting* options, concern for the ability to keep the subject in front of the voters is significantly hindered. Would rather the PR of losing it than skipping a 2025 *Town Meeting* and moving to a date in the future.

45:30 Tom: Cautious that if it is *Select Board* sponsored, adequate vetting has to happen, not trying to throw up roadblocks. If the *Council* wants to finish up the charter and ask it to be a *Select Board*-sponsored article in the fall, by all means, go ahead.

46:46 Donna: We have met almost every other week. We are nearly finished with the charter. So, winter is a perfect opportunity to engage with the constituency. Asks group to expand on KP Law concerns.

47:50 Beau: The executive body signs their checks.

47:58 Joe: No issue with KP Law. They do a fabulous job. My concern is that the *Select Board* will not sponsor an article unless it goes through them first, and this amount of work may be overestimated.

49:15 Donna: Wouldn't funding for legal review be allocated if the warrant passes?

49:47 Jeremy (public comment): Certainly, we can ask them how much it will cost before they do any work. Also, many legal and deal technologies can remedy the conflict issue. You could also have a *term sheet* or another law firm to come in and ensure nothing is of concern.

50:25 Beau: Let's game this; KP Law says this work will be one hundred grand...

50:35 Jeremy: I got to think that's too high of a number.

50:41 Beau: We are to wait until the next *Town Meeting*. This could go on for a long time.

51:06 Joe: The *Select Board* and Libby have been very supportive of this committee. Nobody blinked when we asked for a little more money. And I think if we needed another ten grand for the Collins Center, we would receive it with the *Select Board's* support.

52:11 Jeff: Concerned we're asking the executive branch to recommend changing the legislative branch, i.e., asking one branch of government to change the other. That puts them in a tough spot as the *Board*. Also does not see the benefits of going to a *Town Meeting* soon if adequate work has not been done and thinks there is a much more significant risk of any vote not passing it and damaging support for *TCSC* to proceed and funding for the legal work.

54:29 Jill: To the group, do you want the *Select Board* to endorse this?

54:42 Jeff: Does not think it is a fair question to ask them.

54:47 Jill: If they fund the research, they kind of endorse it. Worth considering who we want to build momentum with. Also, a lot of new money is being asked for this year, so there may be some tension between the *Town* and the voters.

55:52 Jeff: Does not object to asking the *Select Board* those questions but is conscious that we are asking them to make a tough stance on something where one branch of government affects the functionality of the other.

56:49 Jill: Do we want the *Select Board* to be able to say whether they put this in proper form or not?

56:55 Jeff: That would be great. KP can do that. My concerns are less about the legal review.

57:31 Joe: Was not thinking we would ask for a *Select Board* endorsement; if they would like to support us with this by having a *Select Board* article, that's great. On the other hand, we will have the opportunity to do a citizen's article anyway. Lastly, what do we do for the next nine months if we do not go for a "Sense of the Meeting Vote" on the Town Meeting or the ballot?

59:02 Tom: Point of clarification: the difference between supporting and it being a sponsored article is what I'm digging at, right? Whether we endorse it as individual *Select Board* members or as a body and put it on the warrant is one thing. My clarification would be, does the committee intend to ask the *Select Board* to sponsor the article, to put it on the warrant as a *Town Article*, or is it just that we want to continue the Committee and ask for funding for the Collins Center and KP law, to make sure that that the final charter is in proper form.

1:00:50 Rachel: Does not want to ask *Select Board* to sponsor the article; there's too much conflict, but does not want the momentum to stop. Looking past "Sense of the Meeting Votes", they go first; they are not an article. And looking at the last "Sense of the Meeting Vote" in the *Town Voter Guide*, it says it's nonbinding but can be used in legislative hearings on the proposed changes. Does not want a vote at *Town Meeting* to stop momentum. Supports any way to get debate and feedback but is concerned this could be used against us.

1:03:20 Caroline: If we are successful with public outreach and education, do we not consider ourselves better prepared to represent what we are and what we're suggesting as a committee and take a "Sense of the Meeting Vote" at that point?

1:04:21 Beau: If we shoot for this fall's *Special Town Meeting*, will be barraged with public outreach.

1:05:12 Jill: What are we doing if we do not do a "Sense of the Meeting Vote"? Are we just doing outreach and putting it on the warrant in the fall?

1:05:57 Rachel: Not opposed to it, but worried the current language is too definitive, and the forum doesn't feel like the best place to get PR.

1:07:23 Jeff: Wants to know what level of presentation can be made? Is it just a printed article and a snapshot reaction? Is there no debate and feedback? Agrees outreach is necessary but doesn't want to create additional and unnecessary hurdles.

1:08:17 Jill: What if it goes on the warrant and gets soundly rejected? What is the follow-up? Getting rejected at “Sense of the Meeting Vote” is a good start.

1:09:05 Jeff: Well, what if a “Sense of the Meeting Vote” gets rejected?

1:09:14 Jill: The questions we had were good. The question did not ask whether you were committed to it but whether you wanted to know more.

1:09:15 Joe: “Sense of the Meeting Vote” and a ballot vote give us two crucial data points and allow us to educate people further.

1:11:44 Donna: This is about gathering information. We want more information about how to do our jobs or respond to things we inadvertently missed.

1:12:15 Joe: If the election comes back and we're soundly trounced, that's a pretty good display of the island doesn't want to change, but I don't suspect that's the case.

1:12:53 Caroline: Can you explain more of why and how the damage a “no” vote could have?

1:13:22 Beau: The potential problem is the contingencies thereafter by executive members hinging on the question and vote. Also, that would not help us if there's no debate and a vote.

1:14:17 Jeff: Concern is building momentum for people who don't want that change.

1:15:27 Caroline: We should continue, considering the other article will be voted on. We are talking strategy, and just because we're devoted to public discourse and holding more public forums, maybe it's still not a good “Sense of the Meeting Vote”. I'm starting to see the harm if we are not in a position to represent ourselves adequately.

1:16:45 Jeff: Worried that the data collected could be harmful; it could be used to continue a narrative against further *Town Council* efforts.

1:17:53 Lucy: (public comment): There's no debate for a “Sense of the Meeting Vote”?

1:18:06 Jeremy (public comment): Joe must determine what can be done in a public forum.

1:19:52 Joe: Will talk to Sarah before our next meeting in early January.

1:20:05 Jeff: When do we need to have this ready?

1:20:20 Joe & Tom: Warrants likely need to be wrapped up 48 hours before the 22nd of January.

1:25:28 Majority: Meeting adjourned.