

General Government Review Committee
Tuesday, October 25, 2022, 3 p.m.
Adams Town Hall, 8 Park Street, Adams, MA

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Meeting Minutes

TOWN CLERK
ADAMS MASS.

CALL TO ORDER: On the above date the General Government Review Committee (GGRC) held a meeting in the Adams Town Hall Sun Room. The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m. by Vice-Chairman Timothy Burdick. Present from the General Government Review Committee were Tim Burdick, George Haddad, Virginia Duval, Carol Cushenette and Leah Thompson. Members Jeffrey Grandchamp and Carrie Burnett arrived after the start of the meeting. Chairman Donald Sommer and Member Jonathan Butler were absent. Also present were Bernard Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates, LLC, Town Administrator Jay Green, Selectmen Howard Rosenberg, Christine Hoyt and Joseph Nowak, Recording Secretary Brianna Hantman, and Brian Rhodes of iBerkshires.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

a. July 19, 2022

Member Haddad made a motion, seconded by Member Cushenette, to act on the minutes of the July 19, 2022 meeting, which had been tabled in September. Member Cushenette said she would like to table the minutes again. She indicated that inaccuracies still exist, that Member Duval has a list, that revisions need to be made, and that she did not recommend reviewing them all at this time. There were no other requests for amendments. Member Duval will email a file to the recording secretary so that the changes may be incorporated into the text. The revision will be distributed to GGRC members prior to the November meeting where the minutes will be taken up again. The motion passed unanimously.

b. September 20, 2022

Member Cushenette made a motion, seconded by Member Haddad, to table the minutes of the September 20, 2022 meeting because there are inaccuracies in this set as well. Member Duval will follow up by emailing a second file to the recording secretary. The same process will be followed prior to the November meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

UPDATE ON FINANCE COMMITTEE ARTICLE:

Consultant Lynch reported that the proposed changes to Finance Committee bylaws will be held until next spring and taken up at the annual town meeting.

DISCUSSION OF MASSACHUSETTS SELECTMEN'S ASSOCIATION WEBINAR:

Prior to the meeting, Consultant Lynch shared a link to an Oct. 14, 2022 webinar by the Massachusetts Selectmen's Association on "Trends in Municipal Charter and Bylaw Changes." Moderator Andrew Hogeland, Williamstown town manager, was joined by Middleton Town Administrator Andrew Sheehan, Auburn Town Manager Julie Jacobson, and retired Franklin Town Administrator Jeff Nutting. Those who viewed the webinar agreed that it contained thought-provoking information. Member Haddad said it made him feel that the Town of Adams was well ahead of the times in 1983 in establishing a selectmen-town administrator form of government.

Lynch encouraged additional GGRC members to view the webinar. He would also like to arrange for Zachary Blake, chief of the Financial Management Resource Bureau of the state's Division of Local Services, to give a Zoom presentation to the GGRC. The Financial

Management Resource Bureau provides free consulting services to cities and towns on municipal operations, government structure and financial management.

DISCUSSION OF SAMPLE CHARTER AS MODEL FOR FINAL:

Consultant Lynch had also forwarded to GGRC members the charter for the Town of Auburn as an example for comparison. In the MSA webinar, Town Manager Jacobson had indicated that a 2009 charter revision, which changed Auburn's town government to the town manager system and moved most boards from elected to appointed, resulted in greater efficiency and customer focus.

It feels like progress on the Adams charter review is stalled, Lynch commented. In order to give the process a jump start, he will develop a model charter for the town. This will be done over the next month or two. The GGRC can then discuss it point by point and decide on its recommendations.

DISCUSSION OF TOPICS RELATED TO ADAMS BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:

The principal topics to be considered at the meeting were whether any boards or commissions should be changed from elected to appointed, and whether any boards or commissions, elected or appointed, should be eliminated. The general question, Consultant Lynch said, is "What do you want to achieve and what is the way you want to do that?"

The town's elected bodies, other than those required by statute, are the Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Library Trustees, Park Commission, Planning Board, Cemetery Commission, Housing Authority, and Redevelopment Authority. Appointed bodies, other than the Finance Committee appointed by the Town Moderator, are the Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Council on Aging, Traffic Commission and Agricultural Commission

The discussion covered a variety of issues. The current trend, Lynch said, is to have as many boards and positions appointed as possible, and substituting ad hoc committees as necessary.

Member Haddad asked which boards or commissions are having trouble getting people to serve. The response was that this had been a problem in the past, particularly with the Park Commission and Redevelopment Authority, but is not a problem at this time with either elected or appointed bodies. Town Administrator Green added that there also have been problems with turnover, particularly on the Board of Health. There should be a more concerted effort to reach out to a new demographic, with more communications regarding the town's needs and opportunities.

On the question of elected or appointed, it was observed that there can be little to no competition for an elected office or candidates might be unqualified. Response might be better if positions are appointed. Some people do not want their names on the ballot, or do not want to go through the process necessary to become a candidate. Member Grandchamp said appointment may be better to overcome any intimidation factor. Member Cushenette noted that, when a position is appointed, there is the opportunity to meet with people first, to talk with those who have interest.

Several people noted that some boards require more technical knowledge and/or ongoing training while in office. Examples given were the Planning Board, the Board of Health, and the Conservation Commission. The time commitment for such training may discourage people from seeking election or appointment. Consultant Lynch observed that such boards often rely on one strong member. Elected bodies may have no educational requirements. Members of appointed boards can be required to have certain qualifications or to obtain training. Generally, there is

more control over appointed boards. Member Haddad asked if the town should consider giving a stipend to these people, in addition in paying for training, in order to retain them.

All the existing boards and commissions serve a purpose, although there was some uncertainty about the current status of the Redevelopment Authority. There are many options when determining how the responsibilities of these bodies are best or most efficiently fulfilled. For example, the Park Commission might become appointed or converted to an advisory committee with its “paperwork” duties transferred to employees of town departments. Or a full-time assessor might be appointed by the town administrator and three members of the Board of Assessors appointed by selectmen. All appointed positions would be under the supervision of the town administrator. Member Duval asked whether transferring to town employees responsibilities that are now carried out by boards might prove to be too much of a burden on current staff. On the question of elected or appointed, it was generally agreed that any appointment made by the town administrator should continue to be ratified by selectmen.

Member Burdick said he would be open to changing some boards from elected to appointed. It was decided to spend time at the next GGRC meeting looking at each of the town’s elected boards individually, as well as at the three elected positions of town clerk, full-time assessor and treasurer-collector. Decisions will not necessarily be made at that time. Member Haddad said he thought it only fair that the three persons serving in elected positions have an opportunity to state their opinions. It was agreed that these officials will be invited to attend to express their viewpoints and take questions.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Schedule and complete Select Board/Town Administrator interviews, with the appointed subcommittee reporting back to the full GGRC.
2. Obtain information on the origin of the Redevelopment Authority, its past activities and current status;
3. Consider the town’s elected boards and commissions in light of topics addressed in the MSA webinar and a handout from Consultant Lynch regarding criteria supporting a “values” standard for elected offices and a “skills” standard for appointed positions;
4. Receive Community Paradigm Associates model charter for Adams within the next several months for review by the GGRC.

NEXT MEETING DATE(S)

The next meeting date was set for 3 p.m. on Tuesday, November 22, 2022, at Adams Town Hall.

ADJOURNMENT: At 4:35 p.m., Member Grandchamp made a motion to adjourn and Member Cushenette seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Virginia Phelps Duval.

Timothy Burdick, Vice-Chairman