



Town of Adams Massachusetts 01220-2087

GENERAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE
TOWN HALL BUILDING, 8 PARK STREET

Tuesday, April 11, 2023, 3:00 p.m.

TOWN HALL, 8 PARK STREET, ADAMS, MA 01220
1st Floor, Sun Room

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CALL TO ORDER: On the above date the General Government Review Committee (GGRC) held a meeting in the Sun Room of Adams Town Hall. The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m. by Chairman Donald Sommer. Present from the General Government Review Committee, in addition to Chairman Sommer, were Timothy Burdick, George Haddad, Virginia Duval, Leah Thompson, Jeffrey Grandchamp and Carrie Burnett. Members Carol Cushenette and Jonathan Butler were absent. Also present were Administrative Assistant Brianna Hantman, Assessor Paula Wheeler, Town Clerk Haley Meczywor and Treasurer/Collector Kelly Rice. Consultant Bernard Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates, LLC, attended by Zoom.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

January 10, 2023

Member Grandchamp made a motion, seconded by Member Haddad, to accept the minutes of the January 10, 2023 meeting as submitted. The motion passed 5-0 with Member Burnett abstaining.

At the outset of the meeting, in response to Chairman Sommer's suggestion that there be more frequent meetings in order to complete the GGRC's work, Consultant Lynch said that, based upon the initial work plan, the committee is close to the end of the process. Over the course of sub-committee sessions on elected/appointed positions, during conversations with the Select Board chairman and the town administrator, it was indicated that the Select Board is looking to have the group wrap up its work. Lynch said he expected much of the final work to be done at this meeting. He would put together a report to be approved by the GGRC and then presented to the Select Board in June. The report would have recommendations by the GGRC as well as suggestions of areas where more work could be done by whomever the Select Board designates.

DISCUSS REPORT FROM ELECTED/APPOINTED SUB-COMMITTEE:

Chairman Sommers questioned whether this discussion should go forward with two of three elected/appointed sub-committee members absent from the meeting. Consultant Lynch felt that the sub-committee's notes speak for themselves, but that either he or Member Grandchamp should be able to provide any requested clarification. This is one area, he said, where the Select Board is looking for information for further study and the notes should be put in some form to highlight the issues raised by those interviewed - elected officials, board and commission chairs and the town administrator.

Member Grandchamp said he had no further comments to make regarding the notes, but there was no question that the three primary elected officials are dedicated and very qualified

individuals. He believed the sub-committee would stress that the discussion isn't about their qualifications, which in some ways makes it more difficult to objectively assess the issue, so it should be left to the Select Board to decide how to go forward.

Member Burdick felt the GGRC was given a charge to come up with some recommendations. Chairman Sommer agreed. All parties have been heard from, Burdick said, and he, personally, has enough information to render recommendations.

Several members indicated they did not feel that they have enough information to make recommendations. Member Duval said it would be helpful to her to have more detail on certain related issues; for example, was it the intention that, if appointed, officials and members of boards and commissions would be residents of the town as they are now when elected.

Member Grandchamp said he thought it was the consensus of the three on the sub-committee that this is a very complicated issue; the more they interviewed people, the more complex it became. Some decisions require nuanced thinking, different policy considerations, and maybe involve legal liability for the town. It is a very big decision that the town needs to make after a thorough study, which this group is not equipped to do. Member Burnett said the recommendation could be that this needs a more thorough feasibility study and give examples why that is the case.

Member Haddad added that either way, elected or appointed, there is a learning curve for individuals. When he talks to people on the street, he said, they want elected officials and have a lot of faith and confidence in them, and he agrees.

Consultant Lynch said that whatever the GGRC recommends may not end up in an actual document. This is a study commission and the beginning of a very long process involving the Select Board, a charter commission and town meeting.

It was agreed to follow Chairman Sommer's suggestion to put off this item until the next meeting, have the full committee present to review the list of officials and boards one by one, and vote yes, no or further study. If the committee can't make a recommendation or is split, that would be conveyed to the Select Board.

DISCUSS REMAINING WORKPLAN ITEMS:

Member Grandchamp asked if the GGRC would only make a recommendation if the vote was unanimous, or if a recommendation would be made on either a unanimous or majority vote. After discussion, a motion by Member Grandchamp was accepted 6-0 that any recommendation be by majority of the quorum present at the meeting and that the recommendation reflect the tally of the votes.

a. Financial Management Topics

This question, according to Consultant Lynch, is whether or not it is advisable to incorporate language into the town charter which spells out in detail certain issues related to capital planning and forecasting. Member Burnett said the Finance Committee wants capital improvement planning in the charter. The vote was 6-0 to recommend that the town have language regarding financial management tools in the charter.

b. Other Issues

i. TA Residency Requirement Modifications

The Act of 1983 Establishing a Selectmen-Administrator Form of Government in the Town of Adams states that, although the administrator "need not be a resident of the town or of the commonwealth when appointed, he shall become a resident of the town during the first year of his appointment unless otherwise provided by the board of selectmen." Several members

pointed out that the language might dissuade candidates up front from applying because they aren't sure if the residency requirement will be waived. Member Thompson noted that the administrator's position is a niche job with a limited number of qualified candidates. In response to a question from Member Burnett about modern trends, Consultant Lynch said very few communities have residency requirements, though some still have language regarding a waiver. Member Haddad said he is in favor of the keeping the current wording. Member Duval made a motion, seconded by Member Grandchamp, to recommend that the residency requirement for the town administrator be abolished, which passed, 5 -1.

ii. Unnecessary niche positions with organization

Consultant Lynch said this item could be skipped. He could not see anything in the town's structure that is a unique niche position needing to be removed, as opposed to several archaic positions that continue to be required by the state.

iii. Review examples of community engagement charter language

Consultant Lynch provided an example of language from the Town of Plymouth regarding "Communications and Public Engagement." Member Burnett noted that Adams is involved in a digital equity study regarding broadband and devices. Member Thompson commented that the language in the example is vague and perceptions of communication are subjective. The vote was 6-0 to recommend that language be incorporated in the charter setting out principles and strategies for town government to adopt appropriate means of communication to residents and community engagement.

iv. Review examples of formalized strategic planning charter language

Consultant Lynch characterized language tying strategic planning language with the budget and financial planning process as cutting edge. Examples provided included regular master plans, capital investment plans and five-year plans. The vote was 6-0 to recommend to the Select Board that the town consider formalized strategic planning in the charter.

v. Gender neutral language

Consultant Lynch said that, as it is a formidable task to go through a charter and change the language throughout, some communities are addressing the issue by adopting a statement that language is not limited to any gender. The vote was 6-0 in favor of the town's adoption of gender neutral language.

REVIEW NEXT STEPS

a. Report to Select Board

The task for the next meeting will be addressing the report from the elected/appointed sub-committee, item no. 2 on this agenda. Member Grandchamp said he wished to register now that, on votes regarding each office or entity, he is going to abstain. He is not going to recommend whether someone is elected or appointed because he doesn't think he has the necessary information to make that recommendation to the Select Board. Chairman Sommer suggested meeting a second time in the month of April to move along more quickly with the GGRC's work.

NEXT MEETING DATE(S):

The next meeting date is set for 3:30 p.m., Thursday, April 27, 2023, at Adams Town Hall

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Receive from Consultant Lynch a copy of the charter of the Town of Lenox. Copies of e charters of Williamstown, Dalton and Great Barrington have been provided.
2. Receive Community Paradigm Associates model charter for Adams for review by the GGRC.
3. Complete recommendations and prepare report to Board of Selectmen.

ADJOURNMENT: At 4:10 p.m., Member Haddad made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Member Grandchamp. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Virginia Phelps Duval.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Donald R. Sommer".

Donald Sommer, Chairman