

# **Town Governance Study Committee**

## **Public Input Listening Session**

**Old Town Hall, Saturday November 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, 9.30 – 11.00 am**

### **Call to Order**

Mr. Stumpf, as Chair of the Town Governance Study Committee (TGSC) called the meeting to order at 9.35am in the Old Town Hall. The meeting was recorded by Andover TV, but not cablecast live.

### **Participants**

The following members of the committee were present: Town Clerk & Chief Strategy Officer Austin Simko (ex-officio); TGSC Committee members Sandy Stapczynski, Gail Ralston, Richard Fox, David Floreen, Paul Cavicchi, Andrew McBrien, and Jon Stumpf. Bernie Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates was also present.

Fifteen members of the public were present. There was no formal sign-in process so their names are not reported here.

### **1. Opening Remarks**

Mr. Stumpf welcomed the members of the public and thanked them for attending. He also thanked Andover TV for recording the meeting

### **2. Introductory Presentation**

Mr. Stumpf and Mr. Simko gave a brief presentation to introduce the TGSC and describe the purpose of the Listening Session.

- Mr. Stumpf read the Charter of the TGSC verbatim
- Mr. Simko reviewed the overall organization of Andover's government
- Mr. Stumpf explained the nature of the input that the committee was seeking from this session, specifically that the TGSC was hoping to hear comments on how Andover is governed, but not on specific decisions that have been made

### **3. Public Input**

Mr. Stumpf showed a list of “conversation-starter” topics that the members of the public might consider, but stressed that the conversation should not be limited to these topics. He then invited the members of the public to provide their input.

The essence of each of their comments was captured on a flip chart as a brief bullet. The flip chart was intended to provide a highly visible and easily digested resource by which the meeting participants could gauge whether their input was being heard correctly. Each sheet was removed from the flip chart as it became full, and remained on display for the remainder of the meeting. From time to time, the captured bullets were read back to check comprehension. The TGSC did not express opinions at this meeting, nor agree or disagree with any points made.

This following is a verbatim transcript of the flip chart sheets, with the exception that spelling and other typographical errors have been corrected, and minor additions have been incorporated (in italics) to aid comprehension.

#### Transcript

1. *[Andover is]* generally a well-run town. Don't feel obligated to make changes
2. Town Meeting is generally good, with positives and negatives in the details. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water
  - Negative: Hidden "rules" of Town Meeting, eg. Moderator previews PowerPoints, plus others
  - Negative: Uneven application of time limits, especially Town officials compared to citizens
  - Negative: Can't easily see public input provided before the meeting
  - Positive: Town Meeting forces town officials to delve into issues and make them explainable
  - Negative: Lack of nimbleness in Town Meeting process
  - Observation: Previous *[2002 Town Governance Review]* study called towns that have switched from Town Meeting. Key problems that towns switching hoped to solve:
    - i. Moderator expertise – switch to Representative Town Meeting would not fix any problems here
    - ii. Low attendance – even on low nights, Andover turnout exceeds representative Town Meetings
  - Negative: Response time (especially financial emergencies)
  - Negative: Vote on Article 4 *[budget]* as a whole *[single Article]*. Need to force explanations. Don't try to shorten meeting
  - Negative: Moving questions to prevent contrary opinions
  - Positive: Educate each other
3. Tendency not to compromise on issues (eg economic growth vs conservation). Town seems to struggle *[with finding middle ground]*
4. 30,000 population, 10,000 voters. Can't accommodate 10,000 voters in Town Meeting (would be nice problem to have).
5. Electronic Voting (benefits)
  - Confidential – *[open voting is]* big disincentive *[to participation]* at present
  - Accuracy
  - Speed
6. Planning Board – elected vs appointed? (Acknowledge voted on this at Town Meeting)

- Low name recognition *[for positions]* lower on ballot makes it easier to influence votes in favor of developers
7. Getting harder to find out what is happening in town (independent voice). Townsman demise. Maybe town publishes weekly digest of minutes?
  8. Web site doesn't match Seniors' online behaviors or skills
  9. Maximize contribution of true volunteers. They are a great strength *[to Andover]*
  10. Web site vastly improved over last few years
  11. Finance Committee should publish full packet of details of what they will discuss – *[provide voters with]* background
  12. Look at Town Meeting attendance data in detail. Eg first night only, one meeting then never come back. Define the problem.
  13. Zoning Bylaw changes very difficult/complex/*[have potential]* side effects. Difficult for the floor of Town Meeting. How do other towns handle this?
  14. *[Misaligned]* committees' schedules of monthly meetings can introduce big delays in permitting that needs to go to many committees
  15. Finance Committee is a huge positive for the town. Body that looks very deeply/independently at every issue. Watchdog.
  16. Finance Committee report is exceptional
  17. Town Meeting competing for peoples' attention/priority. Ask sports (etc) to hold off events for that week
  18. But where do we put them *[additional attendees]?* Make sure we plan for this *[if we try to increase attendance]*

#### **4. Next Steps**

Mr. Simko presented a slide showing forthcoming outreach activities to gather further input and TGSC meetings

#### **5. Closing Remarks**

Mr. Stumpf again thanked the members of the public for their participation and for the input they had provided

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 10.50am

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew McBrien, Clerk

*Attachments:*

Introductory Presentation slides

