

# TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

**Northfield Town Hall**

**March 13, 2019**

**7:00 PM**

***Location***

***Date***

***Time***

## **Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Brian Brault, Barbara "Bee" Jacque (Clerk), Robert MacEwen, Tammy Pelletier (Chair), Bernie Porada, Emily Stevens (Vice Chair), Jeremy Underwood

Others Present: None

Public Session meeting called to order by Brault at 7:00 PM

1. Brault introduced the Committee members and provided an overview of the Committee and its purpose, in general and for this session. Attendees were given a 2-page summary/handout (attached).

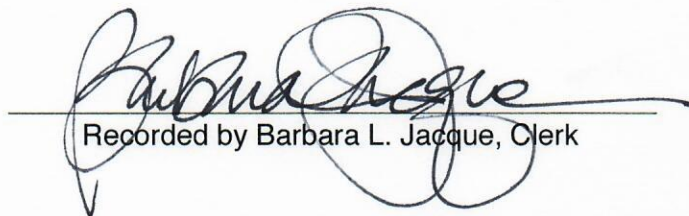
2. Committee members presented each 2019 Potential Recommendation from the summary/handout and attendees provided feedback on each. In addition, the Committee received new ideas on "customer service improvements" especially from those doing town committee work. Suggestions included:

- Friday hours (or at least access to the building for copier and mailboxes);
- Acknowledgement from the Selectboard when receiving submitted reports, feedback, &/or suggestions from committees;
- Business center support like printer ink & paper
- Use of email for submitting minutes & agendas

3. Meeting time/schedule:

- Wednesday, March 20 @ 7 PM

4. On a motion by Brault, seconded by Porada, voted to adjourn @ 8:30 PM.



Recorded by Barbara L. Jacque, Clerk

## **OVERVIEW**

Welcome! Our purpose as the Town Governance Study Committee is to revisit the work of the 2013 Committee and determine what progress has been made and what the needs are now. As we prepare our final report for the Town Meeting in May 2019, we invite your feedback on our recommendations.

## **OUR WORK**

We convened in July 2018 and have met 21 times since then — usually every other week, sometimes weekly. Our work involved:

- Surveying department heads, boards and committees
- Meetings with the Selectboard, Highway Superintendent, the Board of Assessors, Town Clerk, and Town Administrator (interim & new)
- Conducting public sessions & presenting at the Senior Center
- Interviewing officials from towns with five Selectboard members
- Reviewing the Massachusetts Municipal Association's handbook, the University of Massachusetts Boston Collins School's framework for appointing vs. electing, and the Town of Hadley's Service Delivery Plan

Thanks to all who participated, including 2013 Committee members. And thanks to all who reached out individually to us. The process has been truly informative.

## **OUR COMMITTEE**

Brian Brault, Bee Jacque (Clerk), Bob MacEwen, Tammy Pelletier (Chair),  
Bernie Porada, Emily Stevens (Vice Chair), Jeremy Underwood

## **2013 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Create a Town Administrator position. Approved by voters.

Change the Treasurer & Tax Collector positions from elected to appointed by the Selectboard. Approved by voters.

Change the Assessors Clerk from appointed by the Board of Assessors (BoA) to appointed by the Selectboard. Not voted upon. The BoA still appoints the clerk.

Create a set of general governmental by-laws. Northfield has only ~12 pages of legal rules re: dogs, noise, driving, snow removal, & the right to farm.

Change the Town Clerk from elected to appointed by the Selectboard. Not approved by voters. The Town Clerk is still an elected position.

Consider increasing the size of the Selectboard from 3 to 5 after the position of Town Administrator has been in place for a few years.



## 2019 POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Affirm the 2013 recommendation to create a Town Administrator position** — The feedback is indeed supportive of the position. There were concerns expressed, however, about turn-over, hiring candidates with lengthy commutes, lack of longevity, and a lack of consistent focus on personnel policy and employee communication.

**Affirm the 2013 recommendation to appoint the Treasurer & Tax Collector** — Appointing ensures a larger candidate pool of people with qualifications, experience, and expertise, especially for positions critical to finance.

**Keep the Assessors Clerk appointed by the Board of Assessors** — The expertise needed in this position is specific to assessing. The Clerk should be selected by those who have the expertise. We do recommend a clear connection with the Town Administrator for personnel policy and for Town operations (e.g., financial outlook).

**Recommend “customer service” improvements** — We think it’s important for the public to be able to access Town Hall services during evening hours, especially with the convenience of all customer-facing offices open on the same night.

**Affirm the 2013 recommendation to create a set of governmental by-laws** — The feedback is overwhelmingly supportive of creating a comprehensive set of bylaws. It should be clear who enforces them and to what extent. This is a multi-year process worthy of the attention by a committee or commission who can focus on this effort.

**Elect the Town Clerk position but consider appointing at a future point** — The feedback indicates a preference for electing the Town Clerk position and retaining its independence from the Selectboard (“check or balance”). The list of responsibilities for the Town Clerk, however, is lengthy and requires expertise and training, especially for voting and public records. Appointing ensures a larger candidate pool of people with qualifications, experience, and expertise, especially for positions critical to the Town. We recommend re-evaluating election vs. appointment at a future point.

**Recommend increasing the size of the Selectboard from 3 to 5** — Five members would bring more perspectives and points of view to the table, especially for policy-making and priority-setting. We think there is an opportunity for:

- Generating a variety of ideas with more skill sets and areas of expertise
- Increasing the ability to conduct meetings and Town business if one or two members are ill or away
- Distributing workload, e.g., attending other meetings, creating subcommittees
- Greater collaboration — a majority would require three votes instead of two

## MORE INFORMATION

We reserve the first 10 minutes of our meetings for Public Comment. Agendas and minutes can be found on our Town web page.

<https://www.northfieldma.gov/town-governance-study-committee-2018>

You can also contact us via email: [TownGovernance@northfieldma.gov](mailto:TownGovernance@northfieldma.gov)