



GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of the August 1, 2002 Meeting
Hearing Room 7:30 PM

Present: Members George Bailey, David Fixler, David Hearne, Andrew Nebenzahl, Leonard Segal, and Anne Carney

Absent: Dennis Friedman, Patricia Zlotin

Also Present: Paul Bouton, Alice Cheyer, Marilyn Kahn, Myron Kaufman

Chairman Anne Carney called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM.

The committee invited Paul Bouton, the new Town Moderator, to its meeting in order to get his views on how he felt open town meeting was functioning. He said that even though the last meeting was difficult in terms of logistics due to the very large turnout, he felt things went well. George questioned Paul about what he felt was the ideal size for a deliberative body. The moderator said that he couldn't name a precise number but he preferred a large turnout to a small turnout under the open town meeting format. Mrs. Kahn commented at this point on the fact that she was active with the League of Women Voters over twenty years ago when changing the form of government was considered. Her recollection was that towns with representative town meeting format were having the same attendance problems as open town meeting. She said this was a long time ago and things might have changed. Mr. Bouton was asked specifically how he felt such a large group could handle complex issues. Paul felt that while most people probably are not prepared to make complex decisions on zoning issues and the like, he felt that they have a decent understanding of the articles that they have a particular interest in, and they rely on the recommendations of the various boards and committees to help them with other warrant articles. Once again the issue of the best ways to get information out to the general public was discussed.

Dave Fixler asked Paul how he felt about a lottery system for warrant articles and the moderator said that he thought the idea had merit and might work well. He knew Canton did it this way and liked it. The downside of a lottery system was also discussed and the main problem would be not knowing what night an article would come up. This would be difficult for those needing a babysitter if they could only attend one evening. When asked if he would have a problem with the annual town meeting dealing primarily with the budget and money articles and having a second scheduled meeting in the fall for

planning board and zoning issues etc. Paul responded that he would be willing to see if it would improve things by shortening the number of articles on the annual town meeting warrant. The Moderator also stated that he would not have a problem starting meetings at 7:00 or 7:30 instead of 8 PM. He would still favor ending at 11 PM or whenever the article under discussion at that time was finished. He also didn't see a problem with having the election after the annual town meeting.

The two-minute rule for discussion came up and Myron Kaufman was not in favor of it. Mr. Bouton said that the main complaint he has heard concerning town meeting dealt with the length of discussion on articles and the sometimes repetitive nature of the discussion. He said that the two-minute rule was tried and it seemed to satisfy a lot of the objections. He also said that he had flexibility in regard to this rule.

Several members of the committee feel that open town meeting is a weak forum for both short and long term planning and there was considerable discussion on what would be a better vehicle for planning.

Anne thanked Paul for attending the meeting and sharing his ideas with the committee.

Chairman Carney suggested that the agenda for the next meeting should be to make some decisions on issues that have been discussed to date and to come up with concrete recommendations when there is consensus on a specific idea. In that way we can show some progress and reduce the list of items the committee is considering to a reasonable size. Most of the issues left on the list will be of a more complex or controversial nature but the committee should be able to hone in on them one at a time. The committee agreed with this idea and each member will be prepared to vote on the first list of recommendations.

Len spoke to the issue of how this committee, as well as other committees, was run too loosely in terms of allowing what he termed "rude" behavior on the part of citizens who attend the meetings. The Chair responded by saying that while she probably had been too lenient in terms of allowing questions from the audience during the committee's meetings, there had to be a middle ground where citizens felt comfortable expressing their views or asking a question. She feels that being too rigid doesn't serve anyone, least of all this committee that needs citizen participation. In the future, the Chair will attempt to reach a middle ground.

The next meeting will be held on September 11th.

Anne asked for a motion to adjourn. George motioned to adjourn and Dave Hearne seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM

amc