

**Minutes Government Study Committee
February 17, 2005**

Present: George Bailey, Anne Carney, Andy Nebenzahl, Gloria Rose, Pat Zlotin

Moved to accept the minutes of the January 11, 2005 meeting. Approved.

Marilyn Contreas from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) was present to discuss town charters. Her department is charged with coordinating and helping towns with governance issues such as charters among other things.

Marilyn discussed the details of what a charter brings to a town: Clarity, Accountability, and Coordination. A charter defines who is elected, appointed and how the departments interact.

Sharon operates via by-laws and the base line for the by-laws was defined by the legislature so Sharon's governmental structure is based on legislative actions. Anytime Sharon wants to change basic governmental structures such as what departments we have, how many selectmen etc., to the extent it is different that the current legislative mandate, Sharon must have a special act of the legislature to effect the change. A charter would allow Sharon to define how the government is structured without having to have a special act of the legislature every time a change is deemed necessary. As an example, when Sharon chose the merge the Highway Department into the DPW, it would have required a special act to allow it. Combining the Treasurer and Collector would have required a special act. Basically a charter would permit Sharon to centralize departments as needed without having to petition the legislature.

Marilyn discussed the mechanics of forming a charter commission and went through some statistics as to how many communities have charters vs. by-laws and the forms of government. The majority of towns in Massachusetts still operate through by-laws.

Charter commissions usually have PACS formed to support them. A PAC can run issue ads, and lobby for the charter to be approved.

Towns that have been successful in adopting charters have usually done so due to the perception that the current governmental structure does not meet the needs of the town.

Andy mentioned that the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen are considering changes to the by-laws regarding the Standing Building Committee and would like to know if the Government Study Committee would like to support them. This issue will be discussed at the next meeting.

Next Meeting: March 17, 2005 at 7:30, Hearing Room, Town Hall