

REPORT OF THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE

To the Honorable Board of Selectmen:

To the Town Moderator:

To Town Meeting Members:

The Town Government Study Committee (TGSC) was established in November 2011 and reconstituted by vote of the October 28, 2013 Town Meeting with several new members added in the ensuing months. The first meeting of the reconstituted Committee was held March 6, 2014. Seventeen meetings were held in 2014, exclusive of subcommittee meetings.

The Committee continued to meet with the Moderator on improving the Town Meeting experience and efficiency, following up on comments made by Town Meeting members to Committee members and Town officials over the past year. At the TGSC recommendation, new speaker rules were adopted for the 2014 Annual Town meeting in May: (a) each TM speaker is limited to ten minutes; (b) no TM member may speak on a question more than once when any other person desires to be heard; (c) no TM member may speak more than twice on the same article; (d) all of these new rules are subject to waiver by the Moderator as the circumstances deem appropriate.

The Committee is also looking at ways to improve attendance and “meeting retention” of TM members by studying different starting times and the number of nightly meetings per week. The Committee has recommended that warrant articles and recommendations be electronically disseminated to Town Meeting members prior to the meetings and that the articles, recommendations and amendments be visually displayed at the Town Meetings.

The Committee conducted a “brain-storming” session for the second time in three years for the purpose of creating screening criteria to evaluate proposed suggestions and ideas for the Committee’s study. The resulting four criteria ask if the proposed topic will: Increase revenues? Reduce costs? Increase productivity without cost? Increase real or perceived “value”? The Committee reviewed a long list of potential topics to be considered and has been working from that list detailed below with updates on the topics studied in 2014.

A major focus in 2014 has been developing recommendations based upon the Department of Revenue (DOR) Financial Management Review commissioned in 2013 by the Board of Selectmen at the request of the TGSC. There were thirty-three recommendations by the DOR of which the Committee determined that eighteen recommendations were directed to the Town Treasurer, Town Accountant and Town Administrator and did not require study by our Committee.

The Committee supports the recommendation of the DOR for increasing the power and authority of the Town Administrator by delegating certain duties of the Board of Selectmen to the Town Administrator. The Committee had made that recommendation in 2012 and has continued to review and identify functions or duties which should be delegated to the Town Administrator. The Committee researched the duties of this position in other towns and has determined that delegating more day-to-day management responsibilities to the Town Administrator will enable the Board of Selectmen to focus on policy and strategic planning issues for Milton. As 2014 ends, the BOS and the Committee are co-sponsoring a Town Meeting Article for the 2015 Annual Meeting which will accomplish this change and will enable the BOS to focus more time and energy on major policies, issues and strategic planning for the Town.

The DOR Report recommended that the Town consider changing the membership on the BOS from three members to five members. The TGSC Committee conducted research and interviews with officials in other towns comparable to Milton and the overwhelming feedback was favorable for the five member board. A substantial majority of towns similar to Milton in population and budget size have made the switch from a three member board to a five member board because the expanded Board provides greater capacity to address the increasing number of issues and to provide greater resident representation on the Board. The Committee also spoke with many of the former Milton Selectmen to gain their perspective. The Committee had considerable debate on the pros and cons of the recommendation over a period of months. As the year closed out, the Committee voted to recommend the switch from a three member board to a five member board and will submit an Article for that purpose at the Fall 2015 Town Meeting.

The Committee reviewed the DOR recommendations concerning the Warrant Committee (WC) size and its role in defining the Town's finances. Our Committee is not in agreement with the DOR that the WC size should be reduced. The Moderator reports that he is easily able to recruit volunteers to serve on the WC. In addition, the Town's current fragmented governance and financial management has resulted in the Warrant Committee being the one central entity that reviews and assembles the annual budget. The TGSC expects that the adoption of our recommendation for a stronger Town Administrator position will include additional financial duties for the Town Administrator, including coordination of the town-wide budget process. Our Committee also hopes to have recommendations for consideration at the 2015 Fall Town Meeting that would reduce the town-wide financial fragmentation and help the Warrant Committee and its citizen volunteers with its heavy workload.

The DOR report noted a need to strengthen the Audit Committee by clarifying its role and responsibilities and ensure its independence through the creation of a bylaw. Our Committee agrees with the DOR recommendation and has drafted an article for the 2015 May Annual Town Meeting that outlines the appointment process, duties and scope of the Audit Committee, and which requires the Audit Committee to report annually to the Town and Town Meeting.

During 2014, the TGSC met with the Town/ School Consolidation Committee created by the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee to study administrative and financial operations consolidation opportunities. Our committee is fully supportive of that Committee's efforts to implement operational efficiencies and reduce some of the financial fragmentation in town government.

The Department of Revenue report recommended that the Town create a new Assistant Town Administrator for Finance who "would function as the Chief Financial Officer for the Town by coordinating all financial reporting and accounting and also serve as the Town's budget director". The DOR report also recommended converting the elected treasurer/collector position to an appointed position as part of the blending of the Town's multiple independent finance offices. Our Committee's research shows that 83% of all Massachusetts towns with a population greater than 10,000 (132 towns) have an appointed Treasurer/Collector. Milton is one of 22 towns with an elected Treasurer/Collector. Our Committee is still conducting research on this recommendation and a subcommittee of our Committee has met with the Town's Treasurer/Collector to discuss the DOR recommendation. Overall, the Committee is in favor of having the Town Administrator or the Town's CFO prepare multiyear financial forecasts, and the annual budget, and be responsible for financial reporting and accounting duties. We will report back to the Town Meeting and the residents later in 2015 on this DOR recommendation.

The Committee prepared and forwarded an article to the Selectmen for the 2015 Annual Town Meeting to establish an Information Technology (IT) committee which would: (a) develop strategic planning for town-wide IT; (b) assist town departments and boards in evaluating IT plans and funding requests; (c) make recommendations on software systems; and (d) prioritize IT projects. The town had an IT committee that has been inactive for several years and, in conjunction with the DOR review, it was agreed that the IT Committee needed to be reestablished and a clear mission outlined.

It had been noted in the DOR Report that our General Bylaws should be reviewed and recodified with the addition of an index and all locally adopted town ordinances and special acts, but excluding certain by-laws that have been recently written or updated such as the Zoning Bylaws. The Committee agrees and has prepared an article for the upcoming May 2015 Town Meeting for the formation of a committee to make such recommendations.

There are a number of other topics that the Committee has started or will be reviewing including: more consolidation of maintenance and facility related operations; the Town's long range planning capability and execution; the number of and the need for existing boards and commissions.

The Committee expresses appreciation to all Boards, Committees, and Department staff for their cooperation and assistance and, in particular, would like to thank Patricia Cahill and Paula Rizzi of the Selectmen's office for their administrative assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

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