

AN EVALUATION OF STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS OF WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS

REPORT TO THE WESTMINSTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN
BY THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE and
COMMUNITY PARADIGM ASSOCIATES, LLC

June 18, 2018

Committee Creation

- *..." Review and analyze how Westminster's town government is currently organized and make appropriate recommendations for re-organization that will enable town government to function with maximum effectiveness."*

2014 Master Plan

Selectmen Committee Charge

1. Conduct an **in-depth review** of the town's current organizational structure.
1. Obtain information regarding **various models of government structure** from other Massachusetts communities similar in size to Westminster.
1. Identify **strengths and weaknesses** in Westminster's current form of government and areas for improvement.
1. Recommend **changes in the Town's organizational structure**, including but not limited to the terms of office and the method of selection of officials, consistent with the needs of the Town; for example, consider changing the name and duties of the Advisory Board to Finance Committee or changing the Town Clerk's position from elected to appointed.
1. Report its **findings and recommendations** to the Board of Selectmen and then Town Meeting.
1. The ultimate goal of the Town Government Study Committee is to gain the **support and confidence of the public through the creation of a new town charter** establishing the framework for an improved structure of government for the Town of Westminster.
1. Provide recommendation as to which boards/commissions should receive a **stipend**.

Approach and Methodology Used by Community Paradigm

- Reviewed relevant Westminster documents and materials
- Interviews:
 - Selectmen
 - Town Administrator
 - Department Heads
 - Elected Body Representatives
 - Appointed Body Representatives
 - Town Moderator
- Reviewed state DOR reports
- Reviewed Comparable Peer Communities for structure and processes

Comparable Peer Communities

- Ashburnham
- Ayer
- Groton
- Harvard
- Hubbardston
- Lancaster
- Lunenburg
- Pepperell
- Rutland
- Shirley
- Sterling
- West Boylston

Analysis of Information:

The Effective Organization

- Clear lines of authority
- Adequacy of structure to facilitate communication
- Strategic preparedness
- Efficiency and flexible responsiveness
- Proper management of human resources
- Succession planning
- Leadership
- Understandable structure and processes
- Stakeholder confidence
- Orientation to performance

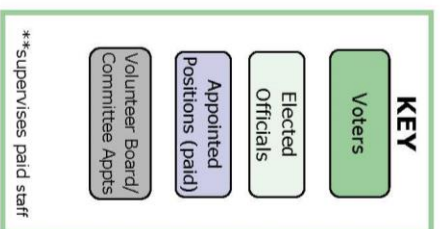
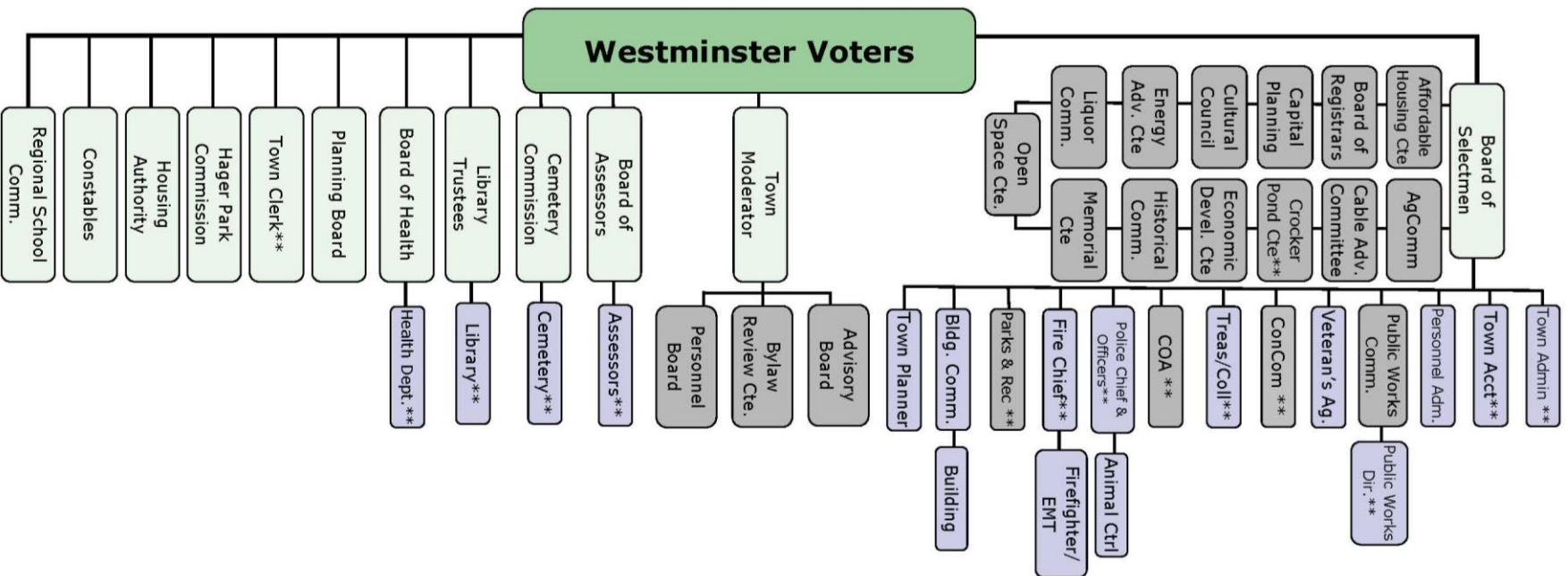
Observations and Findings

- A history of many committed and conscientious elected and appointed officials that care about the Town.
- Devoted and talented department heads affirmatively acting to ensure the success of their departments.
- A willingness of some number of citizens to serve or volunteer in elected or appointed positions.
- The employment of conservative financial practices that have produced a general condition of sustainability for the near term.

Observations and Findings

- Westminster's form of government is too decentralized and results in a lack of accountability.
- Decentralized structure of government dilutes authority and impedes coordination and collaboration.
- Fragmented structure causes frustration by users of the local government
 - Officials considered accountable but have no authority.

CURRENT ORG CHART



Observations and Findings

- Fragmented structure makes communication and coordination of effort difficult.
- Inadequate attention to organizational culture of shared values and mission with coordinated strategic goals and objectives.
- Selectmen need to provide more policy guidance and overall vision through a process for comprehensive strategic planning.
 - Too much emphasis on tactics rather than strategies due to a vacuum in formal management capacity.

Observations and Findings

- A stronger executive is needed to manage operations.
- Without a strong executive, there is a lack of integrated and effective management capacity to handle complex issues.
- Inconsistencies in current operations.
 - Example: human resource administration is splintered

Observations and Findings

- Increasingly difficult to get qualified volunteers for the high number of appointed and elected positions.
- Many elected positions are technical, as opposed to policy-setting roles based upon community values. Creates “exposure to risk.”
- Inefficiencies in operations exposes the Town to potential fiscal pressures in the short- and long-term.
 - Duplication of effort

Consideration of Various Alternatives

1. Method of establishment of form of government
 - Selectmen Policy
 - Local bylaw
 - Special Act Charter
 - Formal Charter Commission
2. Structure of legislative body
 - Town Council
 - Representative Town Meeting
 - Open Town Meeting

Consideration of Various Alternatives

3. Election or appointment of specific officials and multi-member bodies
 - Considerations
 - Policy Making
 - Administrative Responsibilities
 - Technical Expertise Requirements
 - Duplication of Responsibility
 - Fragmentation of Authority
 - Method of Appointments
 - Who and how

Consideration of Various Alternatives

4. Authority and responsibilities of the Chief Operating Officer
 - Weak Town Administrator
 - Strong Town Administrator
 - Town Manager
5. Variety of Other Issues
 - Finance Committee or Advisory Board
 - Stipends for Elected Officials
 - Strategic Planning
 - Charter Review Process

Overriding Recommendation

- Adopt a Home Rule Charter
 - Establish local control over Westminster government
 - A Charter gives permanence to the governmental structure
 - Half the state's communities have adopted Home Rule Charters
 - Two methods of adoption
 - Charter Commission in a year + process
 - Special Act of the Legislature

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #1 – Method of making changes to the form of government**
 - Special Act
 - Maximizes public participation
 - approval of the Open Town Meeting
 - approval by the State Legislature, it will require
 - ballot approval of Westminster voters
 - The Special Act process utilizes the extensive work of the Town Government Study Committee

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #2 –Retention of Open Town Meeting as Legislative Body**
 - Establish standing Spring and Fall sessions
 - Regular Fall Town Meeting provides certainty to an already near-certain occurrence
 - Retain Advisory Board
 - 5 members and existing authority of the Advisory Board
 - No Quorum requirement, unless provided in By-Laws
 - Additional Special Town Meetings as Needed

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #3 – Determination of specific multiple-member bodies and officials to be elected or appointed**
 - Elected officials limited to those that drive policy decisions
 - Technical and administrative functions appointed based upon expertise
 - Accordingly, elected multiple-member bodies and officials would be reduced to the following:
 - Board of Selectmen
 - Regional School Committee
 - Town Moderator
 - Library Trustees – reduced to five members

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #4 – Establishment of Town Manager as Chief Operating Officer**
 - A single voice and authority, to be empowered and held accountable
 - Provides expertise related to the operation of the Town government
 - Charter to specify:
 - Conditions of Appointment/Removal
 - Circumstances related to Temporary Absences
 - Selectmen may appoint screening committee to assist in the selection

Town Manager Authority and Responsibilities

- Direct and supervise all administration
- Keep the Selectmen informed of operational issues
- Budget and Financial Management
- Management of all Town facilities
- Procurement
- Appointment of Department Heads and certain multiple-member bodies
- Personnel Administration including collective bargaining
- Powers of Re-organization, subject to Selectmen approval
- Power of Investigation
- Participates in Strategic Planning with Selectmen

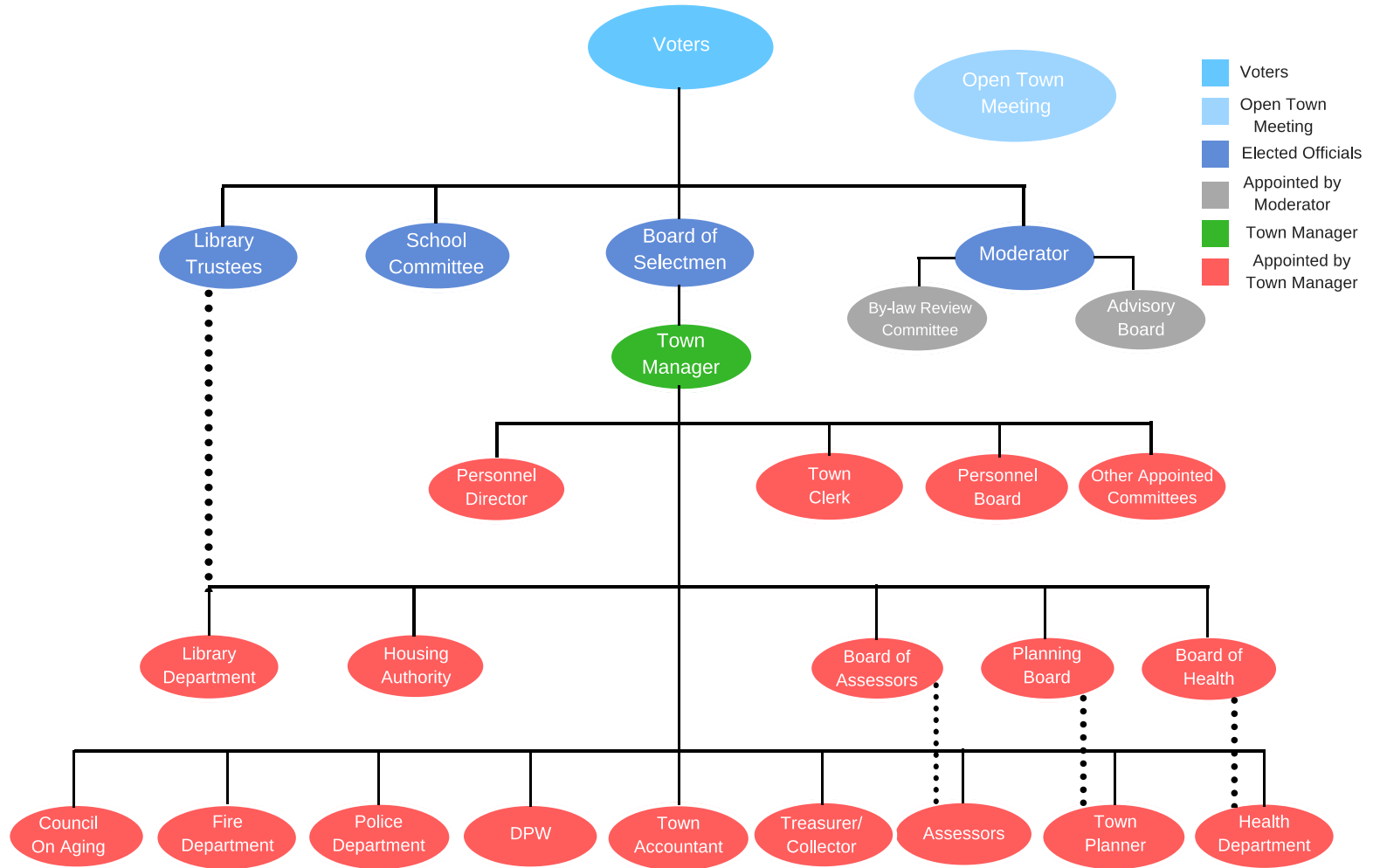
Recommendations

- **Recommendation #5 – A number of previously elected multiple-member bodies and officials to become appointed by the Town Manager with approval of the Board of Selectmen**
 - Elect policy-making officials and convert administrative-based officials to appointed positions:
 - Board of Assessors - **Selectmen's approval required**
 - Board of Health - **Selectmen's approval required**
 - Planning Board - **Selectmen's approval required**
 - Housing Authority - **Selectmen's approval required**
 - Town Clerk
 - Constable
 - Newly established Recreation Commission to assume duties of Hager Park Commission

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #6 – Consolidation of some Boards, and assignment of operations to consolidated departments**
 - Reduce fragmented operation and improve strategic decision-making and increase operational efficiencies
 - The following consolidations are recommended:
 - Board of Selectmen to also serve as Liquor Commission
 - Board of Selectmen assume the statutory public works responsibilities, policy-making, and setting of fees
 - Operational responsibilities for park and cemetery facilities to the existing DPW
 - Create Recreation Commission by Bylaw incorporating the duties of the Hager Park Commission and Crocker Pond Committee

PROPOSED ORG CHART



Recommendations

- **Recommendation #7 – Appointment of Staff and Board /Committee Members**
 - Advisory Board reduced to five members, and continue to be appointed by Moderator.
 - By-Law Review Committee, when deemed necessary, will continue to be appointed by Moderator.
 - Other multi-member bodies appointed by the Town Manager with Board of Selectmen approval unless otherwise provided by Charter.
 - Department Heads appointed by Town Manager.
 - Police Chief, Fire Chief, DPW Director, Treasurer/Collector and Town Accountant – Town Manager appointment, with Board of Selectmen power to veto within 14 days.
 - Consultation with boards as applicable in Departments in which there is an elected or appointed Board.
 - Departmental Staff
 - Appointment by Department Head, with Town Manager approval.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #8 – Human Resources**

- The Town Manager to be the lead
 - Administration of system
 - Collective bargaining
- Board of Selectmen, with consultation of the Personnel Board, for approval of:
 - Personnel Regulations
 - Classification and Compensation plans
- Retain five member Personnel Board in an advisory role to Selectmen and Town Manager. Members appointed by the Town Manager with Selectmen approval

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #9 – Financial Management Issues – Budget, Capital, and Other Finance Provisions**
 - Operating Budget
 - Town Manager sets budget guidelines with approvals
 - Town Manager prepares annual operating budget
 - Advisory Board reviews and makes recommendation
 - Town Manager Budget presented to Town Meeting
 - Capital Plan and Capital Budget
 - Town Manager prepares in consultation with Capital Planning Committee
 - Advisory Board reviews and recommends capital budget article(s)
 - Other Financial Management Provisions
 - Five Year forecast
 - Accounts Payable warrants
 - Management of Funds by Treasurer
 - Annual Audit required

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #10 – Reorganization**
 - The Charter is intended to have flexibility
 - Operational and organizational decisions rest with the Town Manager through reorganizations, subject to Board of Selectmen approval
 - Transfer of funds
 - Transfer, abolish, establish, or re-assign departments
 - Transfer, abolish, establish, or re-assign Boards except those with statutory authority

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #11 – Strategic Planning**

- Finding of lack of strategic direction
 - Day-to-day administration - Town Manager
 - The role of the Board of Selectmen - less routine administrative tasks
 - Increased oversight responsibilities
 - More of a strategic purpose
- Strategic planning is a joint responsibility of the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager whereby Selectmen approve and establish multi-year and annual goals and objectives
 - Conducted every three years
 - Town Manager Annual Goals tied to Plan

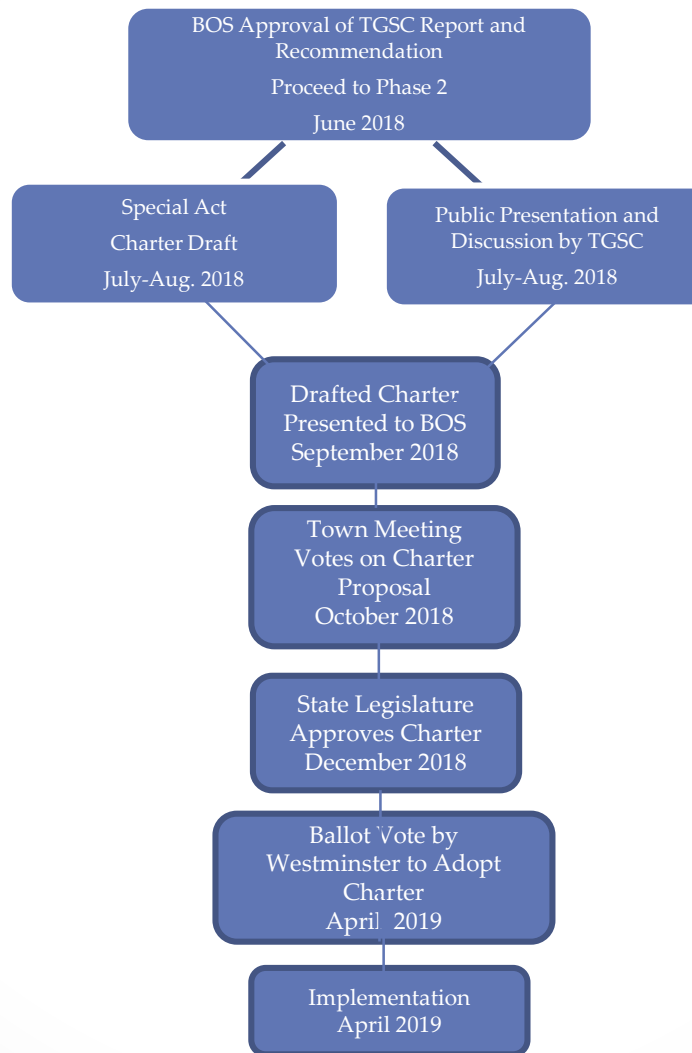
Recommendations

- **Recommendation #12 – Other Provisions**
 - Recall Provision
 - Board of Selectmen can establish standing or *ad hoc* committees
 - Charter Review language
 - First review after five years, thereafter every ten years, with first review to include consideration of size of Board of Selectmen
 - *Ad hoc* Charter Review Committee appointed by BOS

Recommendations

- **Recommendation #13 – Additional issues to be addressed by means other than a Charter**
 - Stipends for elected officials may be addressed through a bylaw
 - A Land Use Department should be considered
 - Consideration should be given to joining the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health
 - Consideration should be given to creating an Assistant Director in the DPW
 - Consideration should be given to utilizing a “lottery” for warrant articles

Next Steps



Questions and Comments

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