

Natick Finance Committee

Pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 3 of the Town of Natick By-Laws, I attest that the attached copy is the approved copy of the minutes for the following Meeting: September 12, 2023

Town of Natick Finance Committee
Meeting Date: September 12, 2023

The minutes were approved through the following action:

Motion:

Made by:

Seconded by:

Vote: 0 – 0 – 0

Date: X, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Cody Jacobs

Secretary

Natick Finance Committee

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. The chair noted that a quorum was present in person and a few others were online.

Roll Call

Members present; R-denotes members attending remotely

Hossam Behery - R
Dirk Coburn
Garth Gayle
Todd Gillenwater
Cody Jacobs
Grace Keeney - R
Toby Metcalf
Kat Monahan
Richard Pope
Philip Rooney
Patti Sciarra
Betty Yobaccio
Linda Wollschlager

Call to Order

Announcements

Public Comments

2023 Fall Town Meeting Warrant Articles - Public Hearing

Motion by Mr. Gillenwater, seconded by Mr. Coburn to open the public hearing. Motion carried unanimously (13-0-0).

Article 11: Personnel Board Classification and Pay Plan

Steve Levinsky, chair of the Personnel Board and Dorothy Blondiet, Director of Human Resources presented.

Mr. Levinsky noted that this covered the non-union employees of the town, which is roughly 65 employees. Tonight, he is asking us to approve the pay plans. He noted that the descriptions of positions are not before us, rather they have been provided for background information but that the main thing to be approved is the pay plans.

Mr. Levinsky noted that there are no changes to the salary ranges in either the part time or full time pay plans. He noted that no changes were recommended at this time because there was no "bunching" in the salary compression analysis that they did.

Mr. Levinsky noted that the Town Administrator said that the pay plan is not getting in the way of hiring any employees. It is competitive.

Questions from the Committee

Mr. Rooney asked whether, in compiling the compression analysis, they took a look at the reasons people were moving up along the payscale (longevity vs. increased skills). Mr. Levinsky said that it depends. He said they take benchmark jobs that are common in towns we compare against and we go back and see what other towns are paying. They use that analysis not only to set the pay plan but also to decide on wage increases for individual employees.

Mr. Rooney asked how they knew whether the jobs they were drawing comparisons to in other towns were actually comparable. Mr. Levinsky said it isn't an exact science in that they can't go interview each town but they just try to look at towns that have some similarities to Natick.

Mr. Pope asked whether Natick has noted some slack in the employment market over the last six months. Ms. Blondiet said that we have been very fortunate recently at getting some great people to join the team.

Mr. Behery asked whether we are looking at a comparison with other towns of the percentage of the budget that makes up individual salaries. Mr. Levinsky said no.

Ms. Monahan asked how many part time employees are covered by the pay plan. Ms. Blondiet said that most part time staff are seasonal and that there are usually over 100 in the parks department.

Ms. Monahan asked if they had an estimate of the number of year around part time employees and Ms. Blondiet said between 30 and 50.

Mr. Gayle asked about comparisons of non-cash components of compensation and whether that was included in the salary survey. Mr. Levinsky said that we do ask about that in the surveys but that most of these towns in the group they look at have fairly consistent benefits.

Ms. Keeney asked why some job descriptions had physical and visual requirements and others did not. Mr. Levinsky answered that it is by position and not every position requires that so they don't note it. At the same time, they are looking at every position to try to make the job descriptions more consistent.

Ms. Keeney asked why the job description for the Town Clerk was readlined since that one is new. Mr. Levinsky explained that the redline reflects changes the Personnel Board wanted from what was originally proposed by the administration.

Public Comments

Martin Kessel, Town Meeting Member, noted that it would be helpful if the pay plan noted which positions were in which departments.

Motions

Mr. Gillenwater moved, seconded by Ms. Sciarra, that we recommend favorable action on the subject matter of Article 11 as presented this evening and included in the meeting materials, with a recommendation that this matter be placed on the consent agenda.

Ms. Wollschlager noted that it would be good to have more data on competitiveness but that she appreciated the compression analysis.

The committee passed the motion unanimously (13-0-0).

Article 30: Replace SATM 2023 Town Seal with 1876 Town Seal

Jeff Alderson, sponsor, presented Article 30. Mr. Alderson explained that he had two purposes with this article to address issues raised by the debate over the town seal that was adopted at Spring Annual Town Meeting of 2023.

The first is legibility. He believes that the new seal is not conveyed well in actually embossed documents.

The second is a matter of process. Mr. Alderson indicated that he believed there was a perception that to have voted no at Spring Annual Town Meeting would be to “throw your lot in with racists” because there was only a choice between the new design presented and the previous town seal. Now that the previous seal has been removed, this proposal would allow Town Meeting an “actual choice on the merits of the design.”

Mr. Alderson also noted that the survey designed by the Town Seal Review Committee was flawed because there was no “control”—that is, there was no opportunity for members of the public to select a more basic seal along the lines of the 1876 design.

Mr. Alderson noted that a design similar to what this proposes is being considered by the communications department as the town logo.

Questions from the Committee

Mr. Jacobs asked whether this could impact the validity of documents embossed with the current seal. Mr. Alderson said it would not.

Mr. Jacobs asked if Mr. Alderson could elaborate on the legibility concerns. Mr. Alderson said there was an issue with the founding date and the name of the town being visible.

Mr. Jacobs asked whether members should vote based on their aesthetic preferences. Mr. Alderson said that was correct.

Mr. Pope asked what's to stop someone from having an even better design next year or how often this change could happen. Mr. Alderson said anyone can bring this up at anytime but speaking for himself he would not bring anything else forward no matter what the outcome is with this vote.

Mr. Gillenwater asked whether this choice is actually the same procedurally as the options

available at the previous Town Meeting (keep one seal or adopt another). Mr. Alderson said that's true procedurally but that the primary focus of the previous debate was on racist imagery in the old seal. Mr. Alderson added he wanted a choice free of the baggage inherent in the old seal.

Mr. Coburn asked whether Mr. Alderson considered whether this proposal would interfere with the branding project being undertaken by the administration. Mr. Alderson answered that he met with the Communication Director and that essentially they were two separate issues.

Ms. Wollschlager asked why we are talking about this now as opposed to waiting for the branding exercise to conclude before we decide on the seal. Mr. Alderson said it was unnecessary that the seal matches or is complementary to our branding.

Public Comment

Dr. Donna McKenzie explained that she felt like she couldn't vote against the new seal at Spring Town Meeting without being perceived as a racist. She felt this put her in an untenable position. She noted that Natick was one of the first communities to adopt a seal and that the seal really needs to convey "authority" and be legible. She argued that the 1876 seal accomplishes that.

Motions

Ms. Sciarra moved that we recommend favorable action on the subject matter of Article 30, seconded by Mr. Pope.

Ms. Sciarra explained that she believed that the process for approving the spring seal was too contentious and that this takes all the emotion out of it and allows an up or down choice.

Mr. Pope agreed that this was a great time to do this while the town was still considering the branding.

Ms. Monahan said that as a Fincom member it is difficult to decide how to vote because this seems like a purely Town Meeting issue. Mr. Jacobs and Mr. Coburn agreed.

Mr. Coburn further explained that he did agree that the process before for voting on the new seal in the spring was difficult. He is, however, wrestling with the interaction between this and the branding project.

Mr. Rooney asked whether the town seal has to conform with how we want to brand the town? He said they don't have to be together and that they are separate and distinct activities.

Ms. Wollschlager noted that the original establishment date is not in this seal and she thinks that's a very important element and she personally doesn't feel like this is the right seal.

The motion failed (6-2-5) with the vote as follows:

Hossam Behery - No
Dirk Coburn - Abstain

Garth Gayle -Abstain
Todd Gillenwater - Yes
Cody Jacobs -Abstain
Grace Keeney - Abstain
Toby Metcalf - Yes
Kat Monahan -Abstain
Richard Pope - Yes
Philip Rooney - Yes
Patti Sciarra -Yes
Betty Yobaccio - Yes
Linda Wollschlager -No

At approximately 8:10 p.m., the committee took a brief recess.

Discussion on Charter and Bylaw Review Committee Articles (24/25/26)

At 8:20, Ms. Wollschlager called the meeting back to order.

Paul Griesmer, chair of the Charter and By-law Review Committee presented on behalf of the CBRC which he noted was currently in session.

He stated that they sponsored two articles, one for by-law changes and one for charter changes. He noted that they hired a special counsel with funding they received at the previous meeting to help them look through the by-laws and especially the charter line by line.

He noted that there are three methods of changing the charter: a charter commission, a special act, or a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of Town Meeting followed by a townwide vote. However, he noted that the last method has certain limitations on what it is able to do (for example, it could not shrink Town Meeting). He mentioned that some of the things they were proposing did fall into those categories so a special act may be a better way to go.

Mr. Griesmer said the strategy here was for everything they bring to Town Meeting, anything Town Meeting approves, will become part of a special act.

Mr. Griesmer stated that they concluded that we should not turn into a city or town council as part of this process. He also noted that the committee concluded that the board of assessors and the board of health should not be changed to appointed positions. He also noted that the committee looked at the idea of ranked choice voting but at the moment they were considering not including it because of a worry that ranked choice method isn't popular with the state legislature.

Mr. Griesmer said that they were considering changing the size of Town Meeting. It is currently 180 members and the question would be dropping it by some multiple of 30. The numbers they are considering right now are 150 and 120. He noted that Town Meeting every session is regularly supported by 150 people, but not the same people show up at every meeting so it's more like 120 on any given night.

Mr. Griesmer noted that they were considering the possibility of changing the way vacancies are

filled to the Moderator from the Town Clerk due to the latter becoming an unelected position.

Mr. Griesmer explained they were considering proposing that they reduce the quorum requirement for Town Meeting and not require every town department to send a representative to Town Meeting every night.

Mr. Griesmer noted that they were also considering having the moderator be able to appoint a deputy moderator to take over in case the moderator is unable to preside over Town Meeting (a role that used to be filled by the clerk before the change to an appointed position).

Mr. Griesmer said they are considering changes to the rules on moving the question at Town Meeting to make things run faster by giving the moderator discretion.

Mr. Griesmer also said they are looking at ways to make more use of the consent agenda.

Mr. Griesmer stated that there are several kinds of appointments the Select Board currently has to make that should be shifted to the town administration.

Mr. Griesmer added that there will be a draft charter change to allow the town administrator to approve certain contracts that the Select Board currently has to approve.

Mr. Griesmer also said they would have a proposal to amend the provisions for removing the Town Administrator to make it potentially easier to remove the Town Administrator.

Mr. Griesmer also said they wanted to eliminate the provision that the Select Board is not allowed to issue policy unless it's broad. He noted that no other municipality has such a policy.

Mr. Griesmer noted that they were looking at dealing with repetitive Town Meeting positions such as allowing Town Meeting to dissolve whenever it wants. We used to be able to do that but a by-law change forced Town Meeting to take a vote on every article. Another option they were considering was a special consent agenda for repetitive motions.

Dr. Donna McKenzie, Committee Member, mentioned that this proposal includes a change to the title of the Town Administrator to a Town Manager. Mr. Griesmer added that legally that's what it is already.

Questions from the Committee

Mr. Coburn asked what the CBRC expects to do in the coming weeks and how can people get involved with the meetings?

Mr. Griesmer indicated that the meetings in the fall will be on Pegasus because they will be in the Select Board meeting room. He also added that they planned to have information sessions for Town Meeting members over the next few weeks.

Mr. Griesmer indicated that they had one zoom meeting earlier in the year but it was a "disaster" because IT gave us the wrong code to launch the zoom meetings.

Ms. Monahan asked whether a majority has to approve a special act. Mr. Griesmer clarified that there is no legal requirement that a special act has to go to the voters. However, they have included that requirement in their proposal.

Ms. Monahan asked whether the School Committee had an opinion about the idea of giving the Town Manager more authority to execute contracts. Mr. Griesmer indicated that this would have no impact on the School Committee.

Mr. Gillenwater asked about the interaction between the different motions and whether they were constructing the motions such that there are no issues with something being inconsistent. Mr. Griesmer confirmed that this was the case.

Ms. Keeney asked whether everything we went through tonight would be proposed at Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Griesmer confirmed that was the case but that there were some issues with by-laws we didn't get to, so the only by-laws being discussed tonight would be ones related to the charter change and the CBRC will be asking for an extension to deal with that.

Ms. Keeney asked whether the provision related to hybrid participation for town employees was considered for Town Meeting members. Mr. Griesmer indicated that they didn't want to address that because the Town Moderator already has a working group looking at hybrid town meetings.

Mr. Jacobs asked why we might change the process for appointing vacant Town Meeting seats to involve the moderator if it is a purely ministerial process. Mr. Griesmer answered that it was not really purely ministerial because the Clerk under the current system gets to decide how long to give someone to respond to a request that they serve and other discretionary things like that.

Mr. Jacobs asked whether the proposed changes to the Town Administrator position would impact the current Town Administrator's contract. Mr. Griesmer said that it would not.

Mr. Pope asked how the Town Administrator's new contract authority under this proposal would compare to the Superintendent's power to make similar contracts. Mr. Griesmer said he did not know.

Mr. Pope asked whether this was concentrating more power or debate in Fincom as opposed to Town Meeting itself by consolidating budget proposals at Town Meeting. Mr. Griesmer said that they weren't proposing anything to change this process but that he was just raising ways other communities have done this.

Ms. Sciarra asked whether more signatures should be required to get a petition on the warrant. Mr. Griesmer answered that they could not change that because it is required by state law.

Ms. Monahan asked when the last time there was a preliminary election. Mr. Griesmer said it had happened this century but he wasn't sure exactly when.

Ms. Keeney asked what the difference is between a charter commission and this committee's work. Mr. Griesmer answered that they looked at everything irrespective of the charter commission's potential work.

Ms. Wollchlager thanked the CRBC for sharing this meeting with us.

Mr. Coburn moved to close the public meeting, seconded by Mr. Gillenwater. The committee voted unanimously to approve the motion (13-0-0).

Meeting Minutes

None.

Committee and Sub-Committee Scheduling

Scheduling discussion was held among the committee.

Committee Discussion (for items not on the agenda)

None.

Adjourn

Mr. Coburn moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Jacobs. The committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 10:11 p.m.