

Freetown Town Meeting Study Committee
Minutes of the Wednesday, July 28, 2021 Meeting
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Cheryl A. Smith

Present: Christine Dupras, Cheryl Estrella, Paul Lubin, Mike McCue, and Kent Wilkins.

Absent: Ellen Lima and Trevor Matthews.

Call to order: Mike McCue called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m.

Review Recommendations for the Fall Town Meeting

Articles for the fall town meeting, prepared based on the discussions at previous meetings of this committee, were reviewed as follows:

- Brief discussion was held on the advisability of increasing quorums for special town meetings from 10 to 25. It was acknowledged that with seven Finance Committee members, three selectmen, the Town Clerk, and the Moderator, a quorum could be achieved with just town officers, which is not good government. A motion was made by Mr. Lubin, seconded by Mrs. Dupras, to put forward this article. The motion carried unanimously.
- On the first of two articles changing the requirement for rising votes to counted votes in acknowledgement that not all can necessarily rise, a motion was made by Mrs. Estrella, seconded by Mr. Wilkins, to put forward the article amending Article 2, Section 2.4. The motion carried unanimously.
- On the second of two articles changing the requirement for rising votes to counted votes, a motion was made by Mrs. Estrella, seconded by Mr. Lubin, to put forward the article amending Article 2, Section 2.9. The motion carried unanimously.
- Discussion was held on the availability of warrants, which must now be available to the residents to review seven days ahead of a meeting. Specifically, discussion was held on whether this should be maintained as seven days, increased to ten days, or increased to fourteen days. A motion was made by Mr. Lubin, seconded by Mrs. Estrella, to go with fourteen days. The motion carried unanimously.
- Brief discussion was held on increasing the number of posting locations for warrants. A motion was made by Mr. Wilkins, seconded by Mrs. Dupras, to put forward the article as presented. The motion carried unanimously.
- Substantial discussion was held on the subject of changing the Finance Committee from elected to appointed, and reducing the number of Finance Committee members from seven to five. Both suggestions had originated with the Finance Committee, and this committee now needs to determine how to execute these changes.

Mr. McCue discussed this matter briefly with Gary Martin, expressing his view that it would be too complicated to try and accomplish both changes at one time. Acknowledging that the Finance Committee currently has seven members, it seemed advisable to pursue the change from elected to appointed first, rather than cutting the number and effectively "firing" two members by eliminating their seats. Consensus agreed with this, and the matter turned to the manner of selection.

Members were polled on whether the Board of Selectmen should be the appointing authority, and it was unanimous that they should not. Although he was not present, it was also noted Mr. Matthews had previously stated he did not feel the selectmen should be involved with appointing Finance Committee members.

Members were next polled on whether the Town Clerk should be involved. Mrs. Dupras and Mrs. Estrella replied no, Messrs. Lubin and McCue replied yes, and Mr. Wilkins abstained. Mrs. Dupras argued that the Town Clerk does not appoint other positions, while Mr. Lubin argued that the Town Clerk is knowledgeable as to the town's activities. Mrs. Dupras felt there could be an ethics question as the Town Clerk is an elected position, and Mr. Wilkins concurred.

Discussion turned to how involved the Finance Committee should be in the appointment process. Mrs. Dupras and Mr. Wilkins discussed pros and cons of the Finance Committee's involvement. Mr. McCue asked for caution against a self-perpetuating committee.

A chart giving information regarding the elected or appointed status, and appointment methods, of Finance Committees in Massachusetts was reviewed, this chart having been put together by the Massachusetts Moderators Association.

Mrs. Estrella stated that as Town Clerk, she did not want the Town Clerk involved with choosing Finance Committee members. Mr. McCue, as Moderator, likewise was not enthusiastic about the Moderator being involved, and did not want the Moderator to be the sole person appointing members as in some towns.

Mr. Lubin suggested the Moderator, the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, and the chairman of the Finance Committee. Mr. Wilkins was against any involvement by the selectmen. Mr. Lubin argued the selectman would be one of three, but Mr. Wilkins likened any involvement by the selectmen to the fox watching the henhouse.

Mr. McCue made a motion that the group consist of the Moderator, the Town Clerk, and the chairman of the Board of Selectmen. The motion was not seconded.

A motion was made by Mr. Lubin, seconded by Mrs. Estrella, that the group consist of the Moderator, the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, and the chairman of the Finance Committee. The vote was as follows:

- ♦ Mr. Wilkins voted no, stating that was only due to the inclusion of a selectman.
- ♦ Mrs. Dupras voted yes, stating it was a step toward appointment even if later amended.
- ♦ Mr. Lubin voted yes.
- ♦ Mrs. Estrella voted yes.
- ♦ Mr. McCue abstained.

As part of the same article, the term of appointment for the Finance Committee was discussed. Mrs. Estrella suggested terms running August 1st to July 31st. Mrs. Dupras clarified the positioning of July was due to the law allowing year-end transfer requests to be taken up until July 15th. Mr. Wilkins made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dupras, to have the terms run July 16th to July 15th, which motion carried unanimously.

- The creation of a permanent by-law review committee was the final topic for discussion. This recommendation was born of the limitations this current committee ran into when discovering other areas of the town's by-laws needing attention. The wisdom of including a member from the Planning Board was debated, as was the inclusion of the Moderator, Town Administrator, and/or the Police Chief.

A motion was made by Mrs. Dupras, seconded by Mr. Wilkins, for a committee consisting of one selectman, one Finance Committee member, the Town Clerk or designee, the Moderator, the Town Administrator, a Planning Board member, and one resident from each precinct appointed by the

Moderator, for a total of nine. The motion carried 3-2, with Mr. Wilkins, Mrs. Dupras, and Mr. Lubin in favor and Mrs. Estrella and Mr. McCue against.

No Need for Future Meeting

With all items resolved, there was no immediate need to schedule a future meeting. Committee terms expire December 31st, so there is no issue scheduling another meeting should the need arise.

Mrs. Estrella expressed her thorough enjoyment of working with this group. All other members seconded that feeling.

Other Business Properly Before the Commission

None.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Mrs. Estrella, seconded by Mr. Lubin, to adjourn. Vote was then taken by roll call: Dupras – aye, Estrella – aye, Lubin – aye, Wilkins – aye, McCue – aye. Motion carries 5-0-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: _____
Michael T. McCue, Chairman