Minutes of the Williamstown Charter Review Committee

Meeting of January 5, 2023

Williamstown Town Hall

Present: Budington, Strait, Kennedy and Hogeland (in the room); Bergeron, Johnson and Skinner (via Zoom)

Also present in the room: Robert Menicocci, Charles Bonenti

The meeting was called to order at 1:30pm

1. Taking of Minutes – Andy Hogeland agreed to take minutes of this meeting
2. Approval of minutes of December 1, 2022 - Motion to approve by Jeff, second by Mary Mary Kennedy. Approved by roll call vote with all members except Jeff Johnson voting Aye; Johnson abstained.
3. Discussion of Interviews of Boards and Staff – Jeff Strait explained that the group working on the questionnaire (Strait, Bergeron, Kennedy) had tweaked some questions and added new ones on the appointment of committees and term limits and the number of members on the committee. Bergeron explained the plan was to have the survey conducted on-line and would work with the town on implementing it and add directions on how to fill out the survey. The committee decided not to ask about who the appointing authority should be. The committee decided to add a question about ideas for improving the process for developing warrant articles.

   Bob Menicocci reported the Charter process was discussed at a recent department heads meeting, with the assignment to think about the Charter and discuss it at their January meeting. Bergeron asked that consideration be given to getting employees' responses confidentially to promote frank responses. Bob will include that consideration in his discussions, and will write up the results of his meetings.

4. Discussion of possible town-wide survey – Andy noted that we can put a one-page survey in with the tax bills going out in early March, avoiding extra postage costs. To meet that deadline we would have to meet more often to finalize the questions. He also noted a running list of topics that we need to address over the longer term, and some may be appropriate for the survey. Jeff Johnson noted that he had looked at surveys by other towns, that might be useful as models for our questions. Jeff Strait noted that tax bills only go to homeowners, so we would miss renters. Anne Skinner noted it should be physically available at the library and other locations. Joe Bergeron asked what the Comprehensive Plan Committees process was, but none present knew. Hogeland explained past surveys sent out with tax bills or Street Surveys yielded a good response. Menicocci said the town might have street addresses, but not tenant names so that might be a way to reach them. Several members noted a challenge will be how to ask questions without somehow informing the respondents what the background of the question is, so some topics might be too complicated to ask about. Hogeland, Budington and Johnson will try to present a draft to be discussed at an additional meeting to be scheduled in mid-to-late January.

5. Discussion of offer to explain rank-choice voting – We received an offer from a group promoting ranked choice voting to meet with us to explain the concept. The committee agreed it was a topic worth hearing about.
6. Public comment – Charles Bonenti asked about the scope of the employees who would be asked for their views. Menicocci explained it would be town employees, including the library, but would not cover school employees as they were not under his jurisdiction. Bonenti also noted paper copies were placed at the library, and some were translated into Spanish.
7. Possible future actions – The committee noted it might set up a forum in May or maybe at Town Meeting, depending in part on the status of the survey responses. Strait asked about future consultant help, and Hogeland noted that the Collins Center was available as needed so we could tap them whenever we are ready to get their advice, which could be anytime, but might best await mid-year or later once we have honed down the issues we want to tackle. Some issues need cleanup or clarification, like the relationship to the school district or the ban on some officials from holding other town offices. Johnson agreed we need to keep a list of issues, and decide whether the topic should be addressed either in the Charter or By-Laws. Policies are another option. Kennedy noted any policies need to be documented and archived. Skinner noted a preference for keeping the Charter as general as possible, but finding the right place for other topics. The running list presented at the meeting can continue to grow as a place to flag issues for discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:13pm

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Hogeland, Acting Secretary