



2013 CONCORD ANNUAL TOWN REPORT

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Town Governance Study Committee

The 11-member Town Governance Study Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen at the close of the 2013 Annual Town Meeting, broadly charged with reviewing “the Town charter of Concord and its form of government, [and evaluating] whether any changes would be beneficial to the town.” The Committee is charged with reviewing the Town’s government and its component parts, including the relationship of the charter to the bylaws and policies of the Town, the duties and responsibilities of Town officials and Town committees, and our legislative body, which is Town Meeting. The charge also included a number of items looking at the Town’s governance more broadly, including practices and procedures of elected and appointed officials, and ways to make Town governance more understandable and accessible to citizens.

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Under State law, a Town’s charter provides the basic provisions which set up the form, structure, and organization of a city or Town government including the powers and duties of the important officials. The charter is somewhat like the ‘constitution’ of a city or town. Of course a town is also subject to numerous State and Federal laws as well as local bylaws, ordinances, policies, and procedures that are not part of the charter.

Prior to the 1950s, Concord operated without a charter, as did most small towns in the Commonwealth. At the close of World War II, Concord had a population of just over 8,000 persons, roughly half of whom were registered voters. The Town was governed by a three-member Board of Selectmen and numerous elected and independent officials and committees.

After the war, many towns in Massachusetts grew quickly, putting new demands on municipal government and, in response, several municipalities, including Concord, adopted charters that established “town manager” forms of government.

While keeping an elected Board of Selectmen, School Committee, and

Moderator, the Concord charter put responsibility for the day-to-day responsibilities of Town governance in a professional town manager. Concord's so-called "strong town manager" charter became effective in 1956. Since its initial passage, the charter has had nine individual amendments, all voted at Town Meeting, and subsequently approved by the Legislature and/or the ballot.

Appointment of the Town Governance Study Committee provides an opportunity for the first comprehensive review of Town governance and the charter since its adoption. Over the last sixty years, many practices of local government have evolved. Developments in technology and changes in Federal, State, and local laws have affected our lifestyles, the way we govern, and the way we interface with our government. Residents ask for greater transparency and access to government. Many Town services exist that were not dreamed of in the 1950's. Is Concord's structure of government still an effective one? Are there changes that would be beneficial to the Town?

Among the topics the Committee is considering are: whether to retain our form of government with a Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Moderator, and appointed Town Manager; whether to retain an Open Town Meeting as the community's legislative body; whether to change or update descriptions of roles and responsibilities; whether to recommend term limits or a recall provision for elected officials; whether to recommend changes in budget coordination and timing; Town and school coordination; committee appointment procedures; committee training and conduct; how to improve citizen access to information; how to improve communications between Town officials and citizens; and how to capitalize on the opportunities offered by information technology in Concord's governance.

Since its first meeting on May 2, the Committee has met biweekly; there were 17 working meetings as well as two public forums. Members have reviewed the charters of other communities and visited communities that have recently reviewed their charters, or whose charters or form of governance were of interest. Members of the Committee have met with some of Concord's elected and appointed officials. The Committee sent a survey to current chairs of all Town committees as well as all "retired" Selectmen. Numerous emails and letters have been received from citizens, and a number of residents regularly attend Committee meetings.

The Committee is preparing preliminary recommendations that will be shared in a second stage of community engagement in the winter and spring of 2014. After the public comment period, the Committee will review and revise the recommendations and then vote a final package, with a final report due August 31, 2014.

The Committee placed no items on the Warrant for the 2014 Annual Town Meeting.



Seated from left: Peggy Briggs, Ned Perry, Clerk; Sally Schnitzer, Chair; Tom Swaim, Vice Chair; Paul Horwitz. Standing from left: Tom Piper, Carol Wilson, Herb Wilkins, Elizabeth Akehurst-Moore, Pam Hill, John Stevens

Anita Tekle