

## COMMITTEE ON TOWN ORGANIZATION & STRUCTURE

Wednesday, September 1, 2021 – 7:00 PM

CTOS Members Present: Jean Berg, Chair; Richard Benka; Harry Bohrs; Abby Cox; Betsy DeWitt; Sean Lynn-Jones

The meeting was called to order. The minutes of the July 8, 2021 meeting were approved, with all members present voting yes by roll call vote.

Harry Bohrs reported that an ad hoc subcommittee of the Advisory Committee was working on BFAC Recommendation 4 and CTOS did not need to prod the AC. He did not anticipate any warrant article for the November 2021 Town Meeting, but rather administrative changes within the AC.

The Committee discussed the question of possible changes to the Town Administrator Act. Dick Benka stated that the Select Board was proposing a change to the Act that would allow the Board to delegate licensing authority (see further discussion below). But there could potentially be other changes that would strengthen the role of the Town Administrator (or Town Manager) regarding Town management, budgeting, and long-term financial planning. For example, BFAC Recommendations 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10 contemplate the Town and Schools adopting common financial policies, engaging in a common financial review and budget process including summits, instituting a more dynamic process of allocating revenue between Town and School departments, creating enhanced capital planning jointly for the Town and Schools, and collaborating on building maintenance and new school construction. Under the Town's existing By-Laws, the Town Administrator and the Superintendent of Schools are both required to file their budget requests by February 15. The Town Administrator has done that in a timely fashion, but the Schools have been 6 to 10 weeks late. The new Superintendent has said that he is open to a more collaborative role. Betsy DeWitt said the Town-School Partnership may be an avenue for consultation.

Sean Lynn-Jones raised the question of whether changing the role of the Town Administrator would be overtaken by efforts to establish a charter commission to make Brookline a city or whether those efforts were a reason to defer changes in the Town Administrator's authority. Betsy DeWitt pointed out that the charter process was protracted, including signature gathering and Town-wide votes, and that reevaluation of the Town Administrator position could proceed as an option even if the charter process went forward.

With regard to licensing, Dick Benka noted that there was nothing that required CTOS action at this time. The proposed warrant article simply seeks authority to delegate licensing authority. If it passes, Town Meeting will have to decide which licensing to delegate, to whom authority should be delegated, the composition of any licensing board, and so on. Town Meeting may even decide not to delegate certain licenses, believing that the process should be in the hands of an elected body that is politically responsive.

Mike Toffell noted that the Moderator's Committee on BFAC had published its first report. He suggested metrics to assess reforms, such as a survey of those who came before the AC to see whether they found the AC process useful. It was suggested that such a survey should have been done by BFAC before suggesting reforms, or should be done by the Advisory Committee. Sean Lynn-Jones noted that one might do a survey after the AC has implemented its changes, asking how people like those changes. In addition, it was noted that a survey of Town Meeting Members had been completed fairly recently (by Jennifer Goldsmith); that could be reviewed to see whether there were comments about the AC

process. Abby Cox will review that earlier survey. Harry Bohrs pointed out that it was not a simple matter to do a survey.

Dick Benka noted that some TMMs just look at how certain individuals on the AC or Select Board vote, rather than considering the substance of the AC's analysis and recommendations. Betsy DeWitt said that the AC's role should not be opinions and attitudes, but rather providing facts to improve the understanding of Town Meeting. Jean Berg said that the AC used to go through budgets line by line, seeing if there was any way to reduce expenditures. Betsy DeWitt pointed out the difficulty caused by the fact that there can now be 40 warrant articles to be considered for each Town Meeting, whereas in the past there were only 20 or so.

Harry Bohrs pointed out that the AC is looking at how to better present data and to define the consequences of a "yes" or a "no" vote. He noted that a lot of TMMs will just shrug off financial implications, feeling that the AC is too conservative and too focused on finances. It was noted that opinions about the AC varied based on TMMs' political views.

Harry Bohrs noted that Town department heads report difficulty in hiring because the Town is not paying enough. He stated that it was important to look not just at immediate needs but also at non-departmental expenses like health care, pension funding, OPEB funding, and per capita debt. He asked how many TMMs are aware of the Town's debt load, per capita debt service, and pension and OPEB funding gaps. CTOS could suggest a better way for this type of data to be presented than is currently provided in the Town Administrator's Financial Plan.

Sean Lynn-Jones noted that as the school population increased, the Town Administrator and the Deputy Town Administrator did a good job in keeping Town expenses down. Money going to the Schools and the School Budget was not scrutinized in the same way as the Town budget. Town needs were not met. The AC did not take a position on overrides, letting the voters decide, and debt service increased.

Sean Lynn-Jones noted that the AC takes on very significant work with proposed By-Law and Zoning By-Law changes, rewriting provisions in warrant articles, even those drafted by Town departments, to fix serious problems. The AC gets into details; no one else does it as well.

Mike Toffel is not suggesting the CTOS get in the way of the AC. Rather, other organizations around Town might be ineffective and might benefit from CTOS thinking. One way to find that out would be to survey their constituents to find out areas of good and bad performance and to make CTOS more proactive.

Dick Benka pointed out that if the long-term financial issues on the Town side and the School side are not tackled, we will not be addressing fundamental issues that have to be addressed.

Betsy DeWitt stated that we are in an environment where social media drives political or ideological directions, with an example being the loud movement to defund the police driven by events in places outside Brookline.

Jean Berg asked whether CTOS should be more proactive. Should we ask TMMs or the TMMA? How will we know that changes in the AC were successful?

The meeting adjourned.