

Committee to Study Town Governance
Notes for 24 April 17 (Townshend Town Hall 7 p.m.)

Attending: Will Bissonnette, Al Haumann, Philip Moriarty, and Joanna Snelling

1. Call to Order:

Mr. Bissonnette called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

2. Minutes/Notes of previous meeting:

Mr. Moriarty requested authorization to make changes to the Minutes that are technical in nature as long as the committee is informed. That is, fix his mistakes. The committee agreed to permit him to correct technical errors. Mr. Bissonnette asked that the phrase relative to the Selectboard charge be reconsidered (“...absent a charge from the Selectboard”). The committee discussed the question and concluded the minutes reflect the understanding of the committee members at the last meeting. Mr. Moriarty asked that the minutes of the previous minutes be approved as amended (that is, with the mistakes corrected). Approved unanimously.

3. Members of the Public:

None

4. Essentials of Town Government:

Mr. Moriarty — notes on VTLC’s handbooks on Selectboard and Treasurer

Mr. Moriarty hit the highlights of the handbooks. There are very specific skills needed, at least in the financial area, and much more technical information than one could reasonably expect volunteers to master. The very length of the handbooks reflects the complexity of the duties.

Discussion relative to other towns took place. Difficulties and successes in other towns were touched on. Accounting system questions floated near the surface often. Committee members mulled town issues and moved on to reports.

5. Reports on Area Towns:

A. Mr. Haumann — Guilford

Mr. Haumann noted that the finances did not seem to be as big a problem because the Town Clerk and Treasurer were offices held by a single individual. He also pointed out the Town Administrator was proactive in a number of area, and there was a good combination of responding to selectboard requests, acting in anticipation of both selectboard needs and needs that he identifies independently.

B. Ms. Gulack — Jamaica

C. Ms. Snelling — Newfane

Having a new selectboard chair may be causing a few waves while things get sorted out. In general, the system in Newfane has been working.

D. Mr. Bissonnette — Putney

Cynthia Stoddard had great experience with the accounting procedures and helped the town get straight.

Discussion as to what the relationship of the selectboard and treasurer followed. Other town departments were discussed as well. The question of efficiency balanced against selectboard power was mentioned. Initial examination seemed to indicate that Vermont towns solve governance structure questions individually; towns that are effective

have, at a minimum, at least one skilled professional in some position of power (elected officials or manager or administrative assistant) and have good communication among the various town departments. There did not seem to be a 'silver bullet' in a particular structure.

E. Mr. Moriarty — [Wilmington](#)

6. Report on [Interview\(s\) of Townshend Selectboard](#): Mr. Bissonnette

7. Current [Organizational Chart](#): — Mr. Haumann

The chart was a generic one from the state. It did not reflect Townshend's specific situation.

8. VLTC [Resources](#)-- Ms. Gulack

Mr. Bissonnette noted VLTC will deal only with town officers and will charge to provide technical assistance. He will consult with the Selectboard at the meeting of the 25th as to its desires.

9. Discussion:

After noting that other towns managed to make their various pieces mesh in some fashion and that no single structure seems to exist, the committee decided to interview people directly involved in Townshend town government to determine opinions why Townshend's government does not seem to function as well as it might.

Mr. Haumann: Road Foremen, Listers, Joe Daignault

Ms. Snelling: Kathy Hege, Anita Bean, Rob Wright, Steve Frisk, Craig Hunt

Mr. Moriarty: Dick Lucier, Irv Stowell

Mr. Bissonnette: more former selectboard members and VLTC.

Mr. Moriarty will explore the legal ramifications of changing the form of town government.

General discussion of living in Vermont followed.

Committee members should begin to think about how to define the options to present to the Selectboard.

10. Time of Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 17 May 17

11. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Philip M. Moriarty