

**Longmeadow Charter Commission Public Hearings:**  
**June 18, 2003 Williams Middle School Auditorium 7:30pm-9:00pm**  
**June 19, 2003 Council on Aging Dining Room 1:30pm-3:15 pm**  
All Members Present on the 18<sup>th</sup>, seven of nine present on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Comments have been clustered together according to topic. The symbol “#” is placed after a very similar comment to indicate quantity of a certain opinion.

Clerk Rebecca M. Townsend (scribe at the meeting on the 18th)

Roger Wojcik (scribe at the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup>)

**Town Meeting**

- Basic democracy due to one person, one vote premise
- Long tradition
- Diffuse authority keeps officials honest
- Maintain it # # # # #
- Individual can make own points
  - Maybe no one else has considered that person’s idea previously
  - Everyone speaks
- Need better room
  - Or better technology to let other rooms/back of gym see what is going on in the front of the gym
- Look at ways to improve town meeting form
  - Fine tune it # #
- Need to outline pros and cons of each article on the warrant so people know what they are voting for. #
  - Hearing different points of view is good
  - Need to know what yes or no mean for that article
  - Just like the state does for ballot questions, we need same in warrant and on web, LCTV, newspapers
- Need to know why items are presented. This occurs sporadically at best.
- Tyranny of minority/limit special interests
- Apathy is here and in other communities
- Good format #(not a bad form)
- Voting needs to be examined: especially clickers’ competency # #
- Everyone needs a fair shot at presenting
- Address special town meeting rules (petitioner driven)
- Non-attendees are well educated and think they cannot make a decision if they have not prepared—  
need to be educated on warrant
  - Incentive? Door prize? Tax abatement?
- Stack the house is how it’s done
- Limit to 2 meetings per year
- Too long #
- Review special town meeting procedures: 200 signatures is not enough
- Know very little about current form
- Question whether TM or the present structure is worth retaining
- Make TM day a holiday from other events
- Consider absentee voting
  - Excludes busy people
- Need to have many participants

- Some don't care; lose right to complain
  - Happens with other forms too
- Hold town meetings in the day time.
- Use town meetings as a forum for review of budget and warrant articles followed by a separate election to vote each article and budget.
- Establish a means of changing by-laws more quickly than thru the use of articles in the warrant.
- Review the petition procedure that mandates a town meeting (seems to easy to call a town meeting on an issue).

### **Representative Town Meeting**

- Never support it #(Do not endorse)
- Has no input from citizens
- Groups could capture representatives
- Already have one by virtue of the fact that not everyone attends #
  - Not right to have few attendees
- Against it being instituted
- Representatives might not attend special town meetings and prevent a quorum
- In favor, would like town split into wards or precincts
- Have a more representative legislative branch, one less susceptible to block voting.

### **Budget**

- Everyone needs to speak to items, need to know why they are there.
- Need balance in services per dollar
- Examine demographics: what do all people need?
- Need floor on expenditures
  - Don't go down to 0
- Dept. heads should not give selves own raises; bizarre because they cut underlings
  - Investigate raises
- Current financial model breeds competitiveness and antagonism
  - Need better model to gain efficiency and improved communication
- Need to know how other forms of government would handle Prop 2 ½ overrides
- Want clear accountability for the expenditures of all dollars.
- Have the town set a dollar cap on the town budget, prior to budget development, to limit total expenditures.

### **Town Manager**

- New title, new salary
- An executive, whatever the form (Moderator/Manager/mayor) needs to bring a pyramidal structure to government—currently it's too flat.
- Need a professionally trained manager who has responsibility and authority

### **Communication**

- Communication from town government to residents is poor, regards dates of meetings, who's responsible for..., who's accountable for... .###
- Intra-government communication must be improved. #(Breakdown)
  - Inter-department Department heads
- Communication between elected officials and citizens needs improvement. #
  - Citizens are not always heard.

- Toward new people in town
  - Current government takes years to figure out
  - Government needs to send a welcome packet to new residents
- Website needs to be used better
- Newspaper is not up-to-date (Longmeadow News)
- Need to know who is appointed and elected
- Publicize TM better
- Elected officials need to work together
- Need a communication subcommittee
  - Put a positive spin on serving the town

### **Accountability**

- Linked with improved communication
- Need to hold people accountable to their job descriptions
- Currently have little accountability
- Wants officials elected
- Want clear accountability for the expenditures of all dollars.
- Change form of government to a single person/group who is accountable for results.
- Change boards and commissions from 'line' to 'advisory' and have them appointed by a department head who needs the counsel. Balance this change with accountability.

### **Operating Structure**

- Needs consolidation
- Clarify officials' division of labor
- Public needs information to know how things are done and who to go to
- Maintain volunteer committees
- Need a business leader/need a leader
- Too many elected boards/positions (ex Assessors, Clerks)
- Upgrade Clerk's office technology to streamline work and processes
- Everyone controls their own schoolyard
  - Fragmentation needs to be addressed
  - Jurisdiction needs to be addressed #
- Study who should be appointed/elected
- Improve (inefficiencies)—make us more efficient #
- Review 50 elected/appointed boards
  - Consolidate them
  - Need to be up front
- Split and appoint clerk, treasurer, and collector
- Administration is running a \$40 million business (i.e. it is complex)
- Review policies/procedures manual
- Want position descriptions available for town employee positions, including that of town administrator.
- Provide a customer service representative to provide help or direction on issues and problems.
- Want a central authority to whom dep't heads report... for evaluation of performance, etc... .
- Identify the policies/procedures with which all town government units must comply.
- For appointed positions (particularly department heads), define (make public?) job term and other key provisions of employment 'contracts'.
- Include use of recall vote in charter
- Reduce the number of positions reporting to two or more bosses

- Centralize purchasing
- Centralize building operation and maintenance
- Employ a town personnel manager for all employees.

### **Council**

- They stand by their own opinions
- Public stands away from them (not part of them or near them)

### **Mayor**

- In charge of a board
- Not anything better
- Does not control SC
- Does not want one person running the town

### **School Committee**

- SC budget needs clarification for an educated vote
  - Clarify employee benefits, debt/interest, crossing guards
  - Clarify expenditures and income
  - Budgets need to show other income
- 7 elected members is too many
- Review line item flexibility #
  - No renaming line items from year to year
  - Fiscal set up is a problem
  - Leftover money should go to the general fund
  - Don't transfer between accounts
- Review their powers
- Problems with it: process for making change seems long (3 years for officials)
- Need more line items
- Tighten control of School Committee.

### **OTHER**

- Non-Partisan elections must stay.
- Start with a blank page. Think "outside the box" and don't use "cookie cutters"
- Consider a recall vote (referendum?)
- Any change in government will not change tax base
- Hold town meetings for information purposes but vote the budget at an election—polls open 12 hours #
  - There's a question about whether election after informational meetings would draw more than currently
- Need autonomous leader with annual review—not elected or appointed, like shareholders, hired by the town
- Voter turnout depends on what is important to people
- Ensure majority is really heard and not special interests
- Public needs to know options/our agenda

**What can be concluded regards Longmeadow's General premises for good government, as outlined by the participants in Public Hearing #1:**

Officials must be kept honest.

People must have control.

The operating structure is different from the legislative function and structure of government.

Officials must work together for the good of all.

Officials must be relentless in striving to keep the public informed about local news.

Officials must listen (and demonstrate how they are listening) to citizen concerns.

**General Summary:**

Far and away it seemed that those attending the hearing had more than a passing interest in knowing what's going on in town and who to talk to about a problem or concern. People at the hearings seem to prefer keeping Town Meeting and its citizen-based control over the budget but would prefer more professional management over administrative matters. This might lead to more focused accountability, efficiency, customer service, and coordination of efforts (i.e. intra-government communication). If we are to keep Town Meeting, we must do a better job of explaining and publicizing all aspects of it.