

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2009

Present: Ald. Hess-Mahan (Chairman), Albright, Baker, Danberg, and Johnson

#95-09 TOM SHEFF requesting the Board of Aldermen appoint an advisory committee made of up persons who are not elected officials to review the daily processes of the Board of Aldermen and report recommended efficiency improvements to the Board of Aldermen. [03/26/09 @8:34 pm]

NOTE: The item is a request from a citizen to form an advisory committee to look at the processes of the Board of Aldermen and recommend improvements to the Board. Mr. Sheff, the docketor, was unable to join the Committee for discussion of this item but provided an e-mail, which was attached to the agenda. The e-mail outlined Mr. Sheff's suggestions regarding the advisory committee's membership and mission.

Ald. Albright thought that it would be helpful if the Clerk's Office could research docket items and determine how long an item sits on an agenda before it is discussed. Ald. Johnson pointed out that some items such as appointments are dealt with quickly, while items such as the tree ordinance or the noise ordinance take a significant amount of discussion time. Ald. Johnson added that there are also docket items that sit on agendas because it is up to the Chairman whether the items are discussed. Ald. Danberg stated that some type of protocol needed to be established for items that languish on agendas. Ald. Hess-Mahan stated that the federal courts began requiring the clerk for each judge to collect information on how many cases were filed and how many were disposed of within a six-month timeframe. Ald. Baker reminded the Committee that there is a rule within the Rules of the Board requiring docket items to be discussed within a set amount of time.

Ald. Hess-Mahan was thinking about the citizen component of the proposed advisory committee. In talking with Mr. Sheff, he realized that citizens might have entirely different ideas regarding what is inefficient or what is working well. It is his sense that citizens get a very different view. Ald. Hess-Mahan also spoke with Mr. Sheff about procedures that the Aldermen use that may not be transparent to the public, such as proceedings at public hearings. Ald. Mansfield, the Chair of the Land Use Committee, provides written explanation of the procedures at each Land Use public hearing. In addition, President Baker from time to time begins Board meetings with an explanation of first and second call, which is helpful to people unaware of the process. Ald. Hess-Mahan felt that it would be useful to have both aldermanic and citizen input on the advisory committee, as he feels that to most people unfamiliar with City government, the Board of Aldermen meetings are a cipher.

Ald. Hess-Mahan reviewed the information contained in an efficiency report generated by Aldermen in 1972. At the time, the Board of Aldermen did not have any type of process, such as first call and second call. Every single item before the Board was discussed on the floor of the Board and meetings went on until two or three in the morning. There was also some shift

in the Board makeup at that time. Although it was still non-partisan, the Board was dominated by one political party and was in the process of changing over to the other party creating a balance on the Board. During that time, one of the concerns was how often Aldermen voted with each other in blocks. At that time, the Board did not even have Robert's Rules of Order, let alone a set of written rules. The efficiency report was a phenomenal piece of work.

Ald. Johnson suggested looking at the Committee structure, especially when things are docketed to multiple committees. She questioned whether there was a real need for the Post Audit Committee and the Committee on Community Preservation. She believes that the Post Audit Committee could be an important committee, if it was utilized. The advisory committee and Board could do some research on how to better utilize that committee. It is possible that the Board could eliminate the Committee on Community Preservation because applications for Community Preservation Funds have decreased significantly leaving the Committee with a very light workload. The work could go to either the Public Facilities Committee or the Programs and Services Committee depending on the content. Ald. Baker stated that a number of years ago a number of Aldermen looked at the issue of trying to consolidate committees. At that time, the committee structure had two topical issues that were not self-evident. One unexpected benefit was that when some items were discussed in more than one Committee, it seemed to weed out some of the controversy. Those items often went through the Board on first call, where they would not have otherwise. The second issue that generated discussion was the appropriate size for committees. Many Aldermen wanted to discuss certain items while other items did not warrant the same amount of interest. Ald. Baker felt that the Board could benefit by looking at Committee structure again.

Ald. Hess-Mahan noted that there are three basic things that the Committee seems to be discussing as appropriate for discussion by the advisory committee. They relate to workflow, transparency, and committee organization and structure. Ald. Hess-Mahan inquired if there were any other things that should be recommended to Programs and Services Committee.

Ald. Hess-Mahan spoke to David Olson, City Clerk/Clerk of the Board, again about Granicus, which is a web-based software program that would provide additional information to the public on Board meetings. Unfortunately, there has been an ongoing dispute between NewTV and the city over who is going to pay for the program, how much they are going to pay, and who is going to own the equipment associated with Granicus.

Ald. Johnson thought that it would be helpful to have a more user-friendly city website. Ald. Albright pointed out that it is very difficult to search the ordinances and the webpage. Ald. Danberg informed the Committee that she had submitted a stimulus fund request of \$50,000 to redo the city website. She has yet to hear anything regarding the request. She believes that improving the website would go a long way to resolving the transparency issue.

The Committee discussed what type of people should be included on the advisory committee. Ald. Johnson requested a process person with an organizational background. Ald. Albright suggested an information technology professional with database management experience. She would also like to see some type of content management system for docket items, as it would make finding information on webpage much easier. Ald. Johnson stated that

the aldermen appointed to the Committee should represent fairly new members as well as long serving Aldermen. A newer Alderman may have a different view of the Board functions.

The Committee also discussed the size of the proposed advisory committee and felt that between five and eight members was the appropriate size. In addition, Ald. Baker reminded the committee that the Board and Executive office would be in a transition period after the election. He suggested that it might be advisable to institute the advisory committee at the start of the new Board. Ald. Johnson agreed and added that it would be nice to have everything in place by January.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish Advisory Committee in early 2010 to review processes of the Board of Aldermen and report recommended efficiency improvements to the Board of Aldermen
- Advisory Committee should be comprised of 5-8 members including past and present aldermen with range of years of service, citizens with expertise including a process person with organizational background, and an information technology professional with database management experience
- Review of processes of the Board of Aldermen should include workflow, public communication, and committee organization and structure as well as other areas of interest to be determined by the Advisory Committee
- Review of workflow should include analysis of the amount of time docket items remain on committee agendas before discussions and/or actions take place, and development of searchable database indicating status of each docket item with links to agendas, reports and other documents
- Review of public communications should include online availability and retrieval of agendas, reports and other documents from the aldermanic website, explanation of process at public hearings and meetings, and methods for providing effective notice of meetings, hearings and other important events
- Review of committee organization and structure should include possible creation, consolidation and/or elimination of committees or functions of committees, and referral of certain types of items to more than one committee

Note from the Chairman: The Long Range Planning Committee did not discuss whether the Advisory Committee should be an ad hoc or a standing committee, which is an issue that the Programs & Services Committee may wish to address.

All other items were held without discussion and the meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan, Chair