

CITIZEN ADVISORY GROUP

Decision & Control Structure Committee

7-21-08 Update

The original work plan of this committee envisioned a “delayed start” enabling a combining of our tentative observations about the strengths and weaknesses of the City’s decision and control structure with those of other CAG committees already at work on potential cost savings, revenue enhancements, and improvements in capital investment and maintenance.

By the end of July, these four committees will have had sufficient time to develop a preliminary sense of “how things get done” in Newton with respect to such matters as the setting of goals and priorities, budgeting for both operations and capital investments, performance management, and internal and public reporting. At that point, our committee will meet individually with our sister committees to develop collectively a list of the highest priority administrative issues for us to examine in depth.

Pending a systematic review of these issues with other CAG committees, members of this committee have participated, singly and jointly, in preliminary reconnaissance interviews and conversations with Susan Burstein, Tom Daley, Ted Hess-Mahan, Marcia Johnson, Mike Kruse, Sandy Pooler, Verne Vance, David Wilkinson, and Jeffrey Young. And along with the Innovations Committee, we have also initiated a review of Citistat and started compiling a short list of cities, such as Fort Collins, CO and Fort Wayne, IN, which have been pursuing other innovations in municipal planning, control, and public reporting of municipal performance. Finally, we have started familiarizing ourselves with some of the recommended budgeting and performance management practices of the Government Finance Officers Association.

Even before the upcoming “summit meetings” with our sister committees take place, it appears likely that among the highest priority issues on our agenda will be how best to improve upon Newton’s disjointed and highly incremental budgeting, capital allocation, and performance management processes. This is a cluster of issues that has already captured the attention of many CAG members and will most probably become a shared agenda item for our committee and the Capital Structure and Innovations Committees. What is less clear at this point is how deeply this committee will need to delve into an analysis of the effectiveness of the current decision making and review structure within the executive branch and among the Mayor’s Office, the Board of Aldermen, and the School Committee over the generation and allocation of city resources.

Malcolm Salter, Chair
Bill MacKenzie
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