

Meeting Minutes (Mar. 1, 2016)

Charter Commission Interviews with School Committee Members
March 1 & March 2, 2016 (7-9p.m.)
100 Walnut Street, Room 217

Karen Manning and Jane Frantz, [past and present] members of the Newton School Committee.

Other Members of the Charter Commission Present:

Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Brooke Lipsitt, Rhanna Kidwell (Mar. 1 only)

March 1, 2016:

Interviews include Anne Larner , Margaret Albright, Diana Fisher Gomberg, Angela Pitter, Steve Siegel.

The following highlight some of the comments made when School Committee members responded to questions from the Charter Commission's Article 4 Discussion Guide.

Each member had a 20 minute time slot to share his or her thoughts.

Anne Larner:

- **Role of the School Committee:** Defined in the state law. Highlights hiring the superintendent, previously approving appts. Since 1993, Ed Reform has turned appointments over to Superintendent and Principals. In urban centers and cities, there was more interference with appointments. 1993 was less of a change for Newton. SC is involved with budget and advocacy for the system with the city and voters and population and advocacy for operating budget and facilities.
- **Emphasis on SC Setting Values:** The conversations between the SC and Superintendent candidates for hire usually result in the SC hiring someone who is in alignment with the values of the hiring committee. Discussions preceding the hiring push the SC toward articulating and arriving at common values. The School Committee and Superintendent together should reflect the community's values.
- **What is working structurally:** The size of the committee works. If slightly bigger or smaller, could be ok. She believes in 1 SC member from each ward voted on city wide. Tradition of responsibility toward one's individual ward. However, you need to consider balance between local and city.
- **What warrants improvement or change:** Term limits. Turnover is needed as is continuity. Difficult to balance. Avoid forced turnover of a majority. Can cause a strain for the Superintendent.
- **Relationships with School Dept., City Council, etc.:** Communications are all about the people.
- **Composition:** Ambivalent about Staggered terms. They are good for avoiding large turnover, and is not sure it is good to have some ward SC members always elected at non-mayoral elections. This would mean low voter turnout for certain seats. Four year terms have pluses and minuses. 2 year terms mean meeting with the public which is good. Many people have never had a contest.

Margaret Albright

- Role of School Committee~ hiring Superintendent, adhering to Chapter 71, and acting as a policy making body.
- Things that are working well include the size of the School Committee and the Mayor's presence and participation.
- Things that warrant change include the possibility of staggered terms, taking measures to ensure that everyone isn't new - avoid forced turnover.
- School Committee in relation to Superintendent, Mayor's Office, City Council: Chair of Council Ex Officio. The groups are working in separate silos.
- Article 4 not clear. No reference to Chapter 71. SC is member of any building decisions and needs to be part of those discussions.
- 2% reserves [toward building maintenance] very prescriptive. Recommends general language instead. Adhere to Chapter 71.
- There are pluses and minuses to term limits. Serving short times means less influence on MASC. To have influence, need a dozen years.
- Observes that most state regulations are geared toward smaller schools.
- Strange to term limit SC and not City Council. Was that "present-ism" when last charter was written?
- Recommends limit for length of chair, in a positive way and recommends we study charters from Gloucester, Worcester, Cambridge, Melrose. Need to have policies posted.

Angela Pitter Wright

- Role of School Committee: act as policy setting board, hire Superintendent, budget and buildings.
- Working well: Mayor should not be Chair, electing Vice and Vice Chair. 2 - 3 year terms. 4 may be too long. Can't have elections at same time as state wide - spring elections. Would be beneficial if elections were more aligned with the school year.
- Relationship with Councilors: Angela has monthly meeting with her 3 councilors.
- 2% clause about building maintenance needs to be deleted and recommends line items related to this go higher.
- She prefers term limits, and elections of 1 committee member per ward elected at large. 4 year staggered terms - some wards running in non-mayoral years.

Margie Ross Decter:

- Role of School Committee: Guide is Chapter 71: hire and fire superintendent, budget, policy, collective bargaining. Advocacy for public schools. Facilities. Education to students.
- She supports electing SC members at large with representation from the wards. It is helpful that the mayor attends as a voting member. Not open to a city councilor on the School Committee. However it is important to ensure communication.
- Cites Ed reform as a big learning curve for SC. Explains there is a learning curve to be on SC, and re: 2 year terms-- problem to start with learning curve and immediately face another election.
- Relationship with City Council: There is discussion over facilities w/city councilor. Great relationship.

- Budget: Allocation from the City can be an issue. The line item required from the city can be arbitrary.
- Term: 8 years - if term limits. On one hand is opposed to term limits because of belief in democracy [if no term limits]. Want the right mix of people. Elections every 3 years is unrealistic.
- Most junior person on MASC has 16 or 18 years on school Committees and much expertise. They have a big voice. [Being term limited out] can restrict influence as far as National policy.
- Chair should have a term limit of 2 years, etc. SC has self governance for this.
- Filling of vacancies - don't leave unfilled - special election - 9 months too long to go unfilled.
- Budget and facilities - There can be unpredictability. If SC is responsible for budget, there should be some connection.

Steve Siegel:

- Objectives of School Committee: Educating children, hiring Superintendent, reviewing the budget, setting policy, collective bargaining, buildings. He is not looking to expand the role.
- Supports 8 wards elected at large - city wide voting vs. voting within individual ward.
- Vacancies - doesn't perceive that a vacancy would need to be filled right away. Does not feel that anyone will be left without a voice and is inclined to leave that alone.
- Describes that working groups help make SC members representative to whole community.
- Relationship between School Committee and City Council: Depends on the topic and unsure if there should be language in the charter about this.
- 2% clause regarding building maintenance: Understands as a cap not a floor and is curious whether there should be a floor or a call to action.
- Terms: Believes there is a "chaotic mess" every two years. Leans toward staggered four year terms. Term limits - likes the 8 year limit. Observes freshness with new members that is not there with the City Council.
- [Karen Manning asks about the role of the Secretary]: There is Confusion about Secretary and whether there needs to be a vote - what the state law states.
- Don't have term limits for the chair but leave to body to decide. Probably term limited out of being the chair and suggests review period. Open to possible reference in charter.

Diana Fisher Gomberg

- Role of School Committee: Policy, budget, hiring superintendent, contracts, providing community voice - representative voice.
- Structure: Size works well, elected at large. Prevents provincialism. Supports ward representation. Mayor on School Committee is good. City Councilor would muddy the waters. If there were fewer councilors it would be easier to collaborate.
- Diana is the EDCO Chair.
- Most School Committees don't have term limits, but she thinks there is a strength in having them. Provides fresh voices and there can be a mix of those who have served and those starting.
- Beneficial if kids are currently enrolled in the schools. Mentions power of incumbency and thinks term limits could be maybe 10 years and there is the option to come back.
- City Council should have term limits also to avoid power imbalance.
- She does not think term limits are affecting statewide work.
- Elections: 1 per ward can be confining. Interested in "super wards". Don't want to add extra at larges. Geographic distribution is important.
- Term lengths: 2 or 3 years. 4 seems like a long time.
- Eligibility (41B): Requires specific date. Residency needs to be defined.
- Organization - Vote in caucus every November on Chair and Vice Chair after the votes have been certified, not in January.
- Vacancies: Believes vacancy ok after 9 months. Wary of appointments and thinks it is rare there would be need for a tie breaker.
- 2% maintenance: clause before prop 2.5. Need more of a floor than a ceiling. In a tough year, there is pressure.