

## **Meeting Minutes**

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 2:**

#### **Marc Laredo**

- Role of the School Committee: Describes state law and that role is prescribed and there are tremendous limits especially with Ed Reform. Functions as board of directors. Hiring and firing and evaluating the superintendent. Budgetary - collective bargaining. Setting policies. Hold Superintendent accountable.
- Important members are elected from different parts of the city - people want someone they can go to. This allows members to take unpopular stands, but not too many or you'll lose votes. As far as composition: Don't go below 6 or above 10 or 12.
- What warrants change: Charter Maintenance Provision is "silly". Torn on term limits - 8 years still pretty short and it takes 3 to 4 years to get your feet wet and go through cycles. Doesn't feel strongly that they are needed and some turnover is needed.
- Recommends Term lengths of 2 or 4 years. It can be problematic when there are 5 or 6 new members, i.e. with learning about collective bargaining. Can be problematic having staggered terms changing 4 at a time. Without term limits less likely. Doesn't feel it's a prerequisite.
- School Committee with City Council - relationship generally pretty good. City Council should stay out of policy. Overlap is buildings where city has expertise.
- Believes working groups are preferable to subcommittees which he does not think are needed so much for an 8 member board.

#### **Ruth Goldman**

- Role of the School Committee Views the role much like Marc does. Historically a School Committee had more control, but now is a conduit with state mandates. This reflects that times have changed. Hire and supervise superintendent. The role is about Governance and members are not not educators but representatives who oversee budget process and set policy. They are the public face and conduit to public.
- Composition: It currently functions well and number of school Committee members is about right,

could have 1 or two more or less. Chair, Vice Chair - other things are @ discretion of SC.

- Term limits: Likes term limits, but not less than 8 years, and possibly 10 or 12. Feels stability-wise that there are benefits to having the same group for 4 years. [Turnover] can be hard on the Superintendent. Most School Committees don't have term limits - they cycle through role of chairs, like depts. (other municipalities).
- Brief discussion about whether reference to policies belongs in charter. Residential requirement for elections should be revisited because it is confusing and ambiguous.
- Relationship between city council and school Committee. Overall it is reasonable. Sometimes a gap - don't understand the level @ which SC operates and at times can feel like swooping in. Do not have a city councilor sitting on the Board.
- Role of Mayor: Others in group commented. Sometimes good and sometimes not (Marc Laredo). Discussion over whether there could be a gap if Mayor not there or whether information could be funneled to him.
- Other thoughts: As far as staggered terms, the "whole thing is not currently broken". Maybe there could be fewer wards but 8 members should not be elected at large. A goal could be less parochialism, which can be problematic sometimes.

**Gail Glick** (served 2002-2008)

- Role of Newton School Committee: More contracted role after Ed reform. State guiding policy in a lot of cases. Budget, collective bargaining, and school Construction.
- Size/City at large - Geographically our city is class divided. The number of members is acceptable.
- OML provides tension - hard to corral a group and bring them to speed so there is "cobbled communication" which is inefficient.
- Relationship with City Council: Likes communication among segments. City Council only weighed in on budgetary, otherwise sporadic/ issue based.
- Believes there should be a four year term, because after 2 years members are just getting into gear and campaigning is a distraction. Term limits - should be same for SC and City Council and supports 3 four year terms with 12 years term limits. Feels that consistency is there and staggered terms are not essential.
- Other: 2% cap for maintenance: - does not make sense and there should be a floor. Residency requirements look clear to Gail. Proponent of Ward representation. Mayor is member but she is not sure how much he wants to engage. Lines of communication should be consistent.

## **Ellen Gibson**

- School Committee Role: prescribed. Within charter, language should address our role with the education of children or we will all assume/take it for granted. Perhaps refer to "The Whole Child" "All Children". Describes importance of community engagement.
- Structure: Chair and Vice Chair (elected every year). Doesn't line up with length of a term and that can be disruptive. Internal consistency is important.
- Term lengths: argument for four years because it takes a while to get up to speed. Discussion that some traditions and rules are through caucus.
- Term limits: Not having Council and School Committee parallel can set up an imbalance and is inconsistent. Knows SC members in some places stay 30 years and feels incumbency gives advantage. Recommends 12 year term limits. Staggering elections may keep some consistency. 4 years makes a difference in establishing working relationships and reaching collaboration mode.
- Relationships: Mayor weighs in at critical times. Great to have him there. As far as someone from the City Council, the goal is enhanced communication. What is the right answer and how do you get there?
- Other: Residency Requirement is confusing and we need to clarify when the ticker starts. It's a legal term - define it. Discusses 2% and whether there should be a floor. Charter maintenance seems random and should be explicit (?). Does not feel it is important that members' kids are attending Newton schools when serving. Believes in ward representation elected at large.

## **Matt Hills**

- The best way to describe the role of the School Committee is like a Board of Directors. 8 members plus the mayor. The School Department is like a company with the Superintendent the leader of the management team.
- Role: Like a Board of Directors, the School Committee's role is to set broad policy, hold people accountable and make adjustments. The Superintendent, like a CEO does not need 8 people meddling in daily operational affairs. School Committee, even the chair, should go through the Superintendent before engaging with School Dept. staff. Ed Law lays out the responsibilities. Sees David as an excellent leader.
- Term limits: sees arguments against term limits which may be a new point of view. Healthy for local gov't~ forcing turnover. 8 years works well. Having a new generation is healthy. This doesn't have to be same for City Council-- that is a function of their responsibility. There is disadvantage to elections every 2 years. 2 or 4 years. Status quo is good. 12 years is too long. Every 4 years does not sit right and only running once does not sit right. 8 years is a lot better than 12.

- Voter Engagement: People are disengaged with a community they believe in. doesn't think it reflects ill health that there are few people running for seats some elections. Low voter turnout can reflect stability.
- Relationship with other elected officials: there is a legal relationship and interpersonal, and very little interaction over the legal. Mayor proposes budget and SD budget voted up or down. Takes a lot to vote down a school budget. As far as school buildings, heads up are given. With ed reform: School Dept. owns itself,
- Composition of School Committee: Personal bias is that smaller board better than larger. 9 is outer limit. It is a well functioning board and 8 wards represent the different part of the cities. Forced geographic diversity.
- 2% provision for building maintenance - Silly--2% could be woefully low or too high.
- Other: Pro development vs. anti development will always fight in a city. Land use and certain types of devp't projects should be with elected people even though torturous. They are making key decisions.