

Charter Study Committee
Regular Meeting
November 3, 2011
Municipal Center - Room 300

Minutes

PRESENT: Robert Berube, Robert Cornish, Richard Drezek, Stephen Martino, Scott Saunders, Thomas Warnat, Christopher Wazorko,

ABSENT: None

STAFF: Robert E. Lee, Town Manager, Daniel Grasso, Intern

Guests: Plainville Finance Director - Rob Buden, Mansfield Town Manager Matt Hart, Mansfield Director of Finance Cherie Trahan, Mansfield Mayor Betsy Patterson, Plainville Superintendent of Schools Jeff Kitching, Plainville Board of Education Becky Tyrell

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:39 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the October 19 meeting, was made by Mr. Cornish.

Second by: Mr. Martino

All those in favor 7, Opposed 0, Motion passed unanimously

3. Discussion of Town Charter

Plainville Finance Director Rob Buden gave a detailed description of how a combined finance department benefited his previous employer, the Town of Portland. Mr. Buden explained how joining the Board of Education and the Town finance departments in Plainville will provide more transparency and consistency in terms of accounts payable, payroll, budget presentation, and auditing. Mr. Buden stated that the Board and the Town already have a compatible computer system which will make the process easier.

He explained some of the logistics of how the accounting would be handled. Mr. Buden said he would set up the budget so that the education fund would be a separate fund just like the sewer fund is currently. The Town and the BOE utilize two separate banks but he would consolidate everything at one at one bank.

Currently, the Town has two separate bank accounts one for strictly for payroll and one for accounts payable and deposits. Having these funds separated makes it easier for bank reconciliation and for the auditors to review. The BOE has only one bank account and all funds are currently intermingled. If the finance offices were combined Mr. Buden would make two separate bank accounts for the BOE fund as well. Mr. Buden also stated that having the two departments together would make it much easier to produce the EDOO report.

Mr. Saunders asked under this system if the Town Council will ever get financial reports from the BOE with the level of detail that was being requested in the pending FOI case?

Mr. Buden replied yes.

Mr. Martino asked how many jobs would be lost if the departments were combined.

Mr. Buden stated that it is possible no jobs would be lost due to the limited number of people currently working on payroll and AP in both departments. He stated that the transitional period would be complicated and all current staff may still be required.

Mr. Saunders pointed out that the finance director will not be providing any additional oversight over how the BOE money is spent beyond what is allowed by State law. The finance director will mainly just be doing the accounting.

Officials from the Town of Mansfield provided their long experience regarding the combined finance department in their Town. The Mansfield officials were Matt Hart, Town Manager, Mayor Betsy Paterson, and Finance Director Cherie Trahan.

Mr. Hart described Mansfield as a Town with \$44 million budget and 12,000 full time residents. Mansfield has its own school district and is also a member of a regional school district. This means that the Finance Director reports to three CEO's the regional Superintendent, the local Superintendent, and the Town Manager.

Ms. Trahan described how she has three different bosses but still manages to work with all of them equally. She grew up in the system so she simply thinks of herself as a town employee not an employee of one agency or another. She said that there are no surprises when it comes time to drafting each year's budget. She stated that there is no feeling that the BOE is a completely separate entity, it is just another department. Ms. Trahan also provides quarterly reports to the Council with financial details of BOE spending.

Mayor Paterson testified that when they are all meeting to put together the budget there is not a feeling that each department is out to get its share. Instead there is the feeling that there is one pot of money and they all divide it up as equitably as possible.

She stated that if the council has an understanding of what the BOE is doing then barriers get broken down and trust begins to form. It also allows for more creativity and you may get more things done as a group rather than rather than working separately. It will take some time to build trust and it won't be easy.

She also warned that cutting costs is not necessarily the number one goal. Ensuring that all departments are on the same page is more important. Most importantly, with one finance director everyone has confidence in the numbers.

Mr. Hart responded that relationship building takes a long time. He also stated that he meets regularly to discuss budget items and other Town business with both to maintain their cooperative relationship. He also said the he is never surprised by what's in a BOE budget and they are never surprised by his budgets. The BOE and Town produce one combined capital budget. Mr. Hart stated that when putting budgets together everyone understands shared sacrifice is needed in bad times because they are all getting the same financial information all year.

Mr. Kitching commented that this district is much smaller than Plainville and that it was not easy to draw a comparison. He also stated that there are many districts where the BOE and the council work well together and there is no combined finance department. He stated that he cannot control what happened in the past, but going forward he wishes to forge a good relationship with the Town. Mr. Kitching stated that he agreed with many of the benefits of the combined department like sharing services, but did not think that it needed to be forced through the Charter process.

He also stated that there are probably not going to be any savings for the town from the consolidation since only 5 people are currently handling this and they will all be needed. He is not sure that the combined finance department is what led to the trust and communication in Mansfield.

Mr. Lee pointed out that the current situation has gotten us to the point where the BOE is charging the council members for copies of financial documents, and that, with one combined finance department then this will not happen.

Guests from Mansfield left at 8:15.

Mr. Kitching pointed out that Mansfield spends \$16,000 per pupil and their school population is dropping. It is a very different demographic than Plainville.

Mr. Saunders pointed out that there are still members of the Council who cannot get information from the BOE without paying.

Mr. Kitching reiterated that he cannot do anything about the past, and if anyone wants information all they have to do is contact him with a specific question. He agrees that

communication should be improved and it is one of his goals. He again said that he didn't need to be forced upon the BOE in the Charter. Finally, he said that combining both departments could have a negative impact.

Mr. Lee pointed out that it will not be forced upon the BOE unless a charter revision panel and the public vote for it. Then the people of Plainville will be making the decision.

Mr. Kitching agreed with the concepts but it doesn't need to be set in stone, it could be done through agreement.

Mr. Saunders stated that agreements can be ignored but it can't be ignored if it is in the Charter.

Mr. Berube stated that we have a year to start getting along before a full blown charter revision committee will report this to the Town Council and before it is on the ballot. You have until then to start working together. If you don't start working together more cooperatively over the next several months then a Charter change may be appropriate.

4. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Mr. Martino

Second by: Mr. Wazorko

All those in favor 7, all those opposed 0, Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Submitted by:

**Daniel Grass
Intern**