

John Donohue - Chair  
Tasha Buzzell - Vice-Chair  
Melinda Bernardo Cuerda -  
Secretary



Laura Wagner  
David Sequeira

Town of North Attleborough  
**CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**  
43 South Washington Street, North Attleborough, MA 02760  
Phone: (508) 699-0100 ext. 2555

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1/23/2025 - Minutes

**I. Pledge Of Allegiance**

Meeting called to order 6:38 PM

Members present: John Donohue, Melinda Bernardo Cuerda, Laura Wagner, and David Sequeira

Members absent: Tasha Buzzell

**II. Approval Of Minutes**

a. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JANUARY 9, 2025

Motion by Bernardo Cuerda to approve 1/9/2025 minutes. Seconded by Wagner

i. Approved (3-0-1)

**III. Community Announcements**

none

**IV. Resident And Community Comment**

**John Casey - Resident, North Attleborough - Reconsideration of Stipends**

1. Mr. Casey here to offer a second set of comments to CRC regarding stipends. Notes that he attempted to attend last meeting but door was locked.

1. JD: explains that a system glitch prevented entry to building

2. Mr. Casey presents his stipend recommendations for appointed boards and

committees, referencing prior CRC and Town Council (TC) discussions and his past email to TC.

1. Appointed Board Stipends: Indicates that TM Borg proposed per-meeting stipends. Mr. Casey supports this idea but suggests instead a lump sum at year-end to reduce administrative burden.
2. Benchmarking Stipends: Recommends TM/staff gather data from other communities to establish fair stipend rates.
3. Town Council Stipends: Suggests a charter amendment to allow TC stipends based on survey data, noting TC cannot approve for itself.

3. JD: outlines North Attleborough's stipend history, noting that stipends were never increased and were removed to fund crossing guards

4. Mr. Casey emphasizes the importance of data-backed recommendations

## V. OLD BUSINESS

a. NONE AT THIS TIME

None

## VI. New Business

a. PAT MCNIELLY TOWN CLERK

### Interview with Pat McNielly (PM), Town Clerk

#### Introduction

1. JD: asks how long PM has served as Town Clerk
  1. PM: state 32 years in office, with 5 years as Town Clerk
2. JD: asks about responsibilities
  1. PM: lists responsibilities including swearing in officials, maintaining town records dating back to 1887, handling vital records (600 per year), business registrations, marriage intentions, dog licenses, tracking charter amendments, overseeing zoning bylaws, rules, and regulations

#### Bylaw Updates & Codification

1. JD: Asks about efforts to simplify bylaw updates
  1. PM: explains that general and zoning bylaws are available on eCode360 and updated as legislation passes
  2. PM: describes past process where committees met periodically to update bylaws manually. Now bylaws are searchable and downloadable as Word documents for easier amendments
  3. PM: highlights minor discrepancies found in the charter during codification, such as using "ordinance" instead of "bylaw" and referring to "Parks & Recreation" differently than the official term "Park and Recreation Commissioners". Notes that these are scrivener's errors that cannot be changed without a formal amendment. Would like to see these changed.

#### Impact of Charter Transition

1. 1. JD: asks if changing to the charter required a lot of work
  1. PM: explains that processes are still similar but now things operate at a faster pace (e.g. approval timelines shortened from six months to two)
  2. PM: notes that bylaws now pass through the TC instead of requiring Attorney General approval.
2. JD: raises concern about missing provisions from the RTM Act, like write-in candidate requirement for 25 votes.
  1. PM: acknowledges the transition had challenges but emphasize that the change has been positive overall

### **Meeting Minutes & Attendance Tracking**

1. JD: asks about past attendance tracking responsibilities and whether it would be difficult
  1. PM: confirms that attendance is recorded in minutes and would comply if the Town Council requested tracking
2. JD: asks how many boards submit minutes regularly
  1. PM: estimates that 90% of boards submit minutes and are generally improving in compliance. Emphasizes that while noncompliance with submitting minutes is usually due to lack of awareness of requirements, meeting records are mandated permanent records, per bylaws. Ensuring minutes are submitted to the Town Clerk prevents information loss during transitions. Notes that she rarely needs to reference them, but they have proven valuable when she has had to.

### **Improvements under Charter**

1. JD: asks about any desired changes after working under the charter
  1. PM: notes no strong opinions on changes
  2. MBC: asks what improvements she has noticed
    1. PM: highlights a faster pace of overall processes, stronger Town Manager leadership, and better balance in decision-making. Notes "We'd have CIPs open for how many years...that doesn't happen now"
  3. JD: ask if departments are now more interconnected
    1. PM: affirms increased collaboration, particularly since COVID-19, with more teamwork on projects
    2. PM: describes how RTM's biggest issue was lack of participation, leading to quorum challenges
  4. JD: express nostalgia for RTM as a "feeder system" for local government involvement
    1. PM: assures that civic engagement is still present, stating "the bug's still around" (for local government participation)

#### **b. PAT DOLAN ELECTIONS COORDINATOR**

### **Interview with Pat Dolan (PD) - Elections Coordinator**

#### **Introduction**

1. JD: asks PD to introduce herself and describe her role
  1. PD: explains she works as the Elections Coordinator and notes some responsibilities, including: overseeing elections, census updates, voter registration, and jury list accuracy

2. PD: describes the history of the Board of Election Commissioners, which previously ran elections and managed stipends but now mainly provides oversight

3. PD: notes that election processes have evolved as the town has grown, with her and one other person now handling most responsibilities

### **Voter Registration & Precincts**

1. JD: asking about the number of registered voters
  1. PD: estimates between 24,000–28,000, with the federal census showing around 30,000 residents
2. JD: inquires if precincts must be maintained
  1. PD: confirms that precincts remain but have not changed in over a decade. Explains that census data informs redistricting, which involves coordination with federal and state officials
  2. PD: highlights complexities in adjusting district lines, using examples like natural boundaries affecting changes

### **Election Challenges**

1. JD: notes changes in elections, such as early voting and mail-in ballots
  1. PD: explains that early voting began around 2016 and significantly increases workload for their small team
  2. PD: describes the extensive process of mailing ballots, which requires additional weekend work and assistance from poll workers. Gives example of a prior administrative error, where incorrect ballots sent to some voters. Emphasizes that there's complexity in managing thousands of ballots.
2. JD: asks about workload during major elections
  1. PD: indicates that election weeks typically involve overtime that exceeds their straight time (e.g. 37+ hours in overtime)

### **Election Timing & Administrative Burdens**

1. JD: asks about voter turnout differences
  1. PD: explains that state and federal elections see significantly higher participation than local elections, with turnout as high as 75% federally but only 11% for town elections
2. PD: believes that moving town elections to align with federal elections would not increase voter engagement, citing a past dual election where many voters skipped the local ballot despite already being there to vote
  1. JD: notes that voter drop-off increases further down the ballot
3. JD: ask if town elections should remain in the spring
  1. PD: supports spring elections because moving date will have implementation issues
4. **MBC: asks about the risks and burdens of moving elections**
  1. PD: notes administrative burden, difficulty recruiting and managing poll workers, and potential voter confusion from receiving multiple ballots in close succession.
  2. PD: shares past examples of voter confusion with state primary ballots and

mail-in voting deadlines.

### **Voter Turnout & Awareness**

1. PD: explains that voter turnout is primarily driven by high-stakes issues like tax overrides rather than changes in election timing, Notes that past changes, such as moving elections from Monday to Tuesday, had minimal impact
2. LW: stressing the need for data to support any proposed election changes
  1. PD: shares an anecdote of a resident unaware of election dates despite census notices, news coverage, and town postings. Highlights overall challenges in voter awareness and engagement

#### **c. CHRIS SWEET TOWN TREASURER & TAX COLLECTOR**

### **Interview with Chris Sweet (CS) - Town Treasurer and Collector**

#### **Introduction**

1. CS: explains he is the Town Treasurer and Collector, a position that changed under the charter, which he supports. Describes his background in town government since 2002, serving on the Finance Committee, Planning Board, and Board of Selectmen before being elected Treasurer. Notes some of his responsibilities, including: managing town revenue, investing funds, overseeing payroll and vendor payments, and handling tax collections

#### **Finance Operations & Charter Impact**

1. CS: describes his dual role in treasury and collections, with tax collection currently focused on personal property and excise taxes
2. CS: explains that while they could technically centralize collections activities across the town, some of the "billing systems are different, often for good reason". Notes that further centralization of billing could require more staffing and system changes
3. CS: emphasizes the importance of making the position appointed rather than elected to ensure proper qualifications for the role
4. CS: notes belief that town is not large or complex enough to require a Finance Director. Does indicate there will be a vacancy to fill for town accountant role, due to retirement.

#### **Budget & Financial Management**

1. JD: asks about bond ratings and stabilization funds
  1. CS: explains his role in providing financial data for budgeting and borrowing decisions. Explains that forecasting is handled by the Town Accountant, but he provides key information on borrowing and funding approvals.
  2. CS: describes OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) as a major financial obligation with \$6-7 million currently invested
  3. CS: indicates that bond ratings have improved from A to AA+ but OPEB liabilities prevent reaching AAA, which would reduce borrowing costs
  4. CS: indicates that rating agencies recognize the town's improved financial

policies, which contributes to better financial stability

### **Charter vs. Previous Government Structure**

1. JD: asks about differences in financial management before and after the charter change

1. CS: notes that strong Town Manager system has eliminated departmental "fiefdoms," and helps with centralized decision-making. Notes that system prioritizes transparency over efficiency and insures public visibility in financial decisions.

2. CS: notes that the stabilization fund has grown from being depleted under RTM to nearly \$8 million, with an additional \$4.5 million in the CIP fund

3. CS: calls the charter change a "watershed moment" that has professionalized financial management and improved long-term planning

### **Election Structure & Governance**

1. JD: asks about council elections and governance structure

1. CS: notes he's speaking as a resident on this question. Indicates that he supports staggered three-year terms to maintain institutional knowledge

2. CS: notes that RTM elections were often popularity contests, and while the current system of council elections isn't perfect, it is more structured

2. LW: emphasizes CS's point that charter professionalizes government.

d. INVITE DEPARTMENT HEADS TO FUTURE MEETINGS

not discussed

e. WORK ON MEETING SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY & FEBRUARY

not discussed

## **VII. ITEMS UNFORSEEN BY THE CHAIR**

### **Discussion of community engagement plan**

1. JD: Notes that idea was to create a plan for Taylor to produce something for community outreach. Goal is to have it in time for February 6 meeting with Chanelle and Taylor.

Suggests what CRC does have a narrow focus.

2. LW: Gives thoughts on need for educational materials for general public. References slide deck she produced

1. MBC: provides feedback on slide deck as format and opinion on working with comms

2. Action: LW to send materials to Taylor ahead of time. Goal of materials is to build public awareness on how charter works.

3. MBC: asks for feedback on Big Red 311 data effort

1. Action: Melinda will work with Taylor to get data.

## **VIII. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn meeting by Bernardo Cuerda and seconded by Wagner.

Unanimous approval. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM