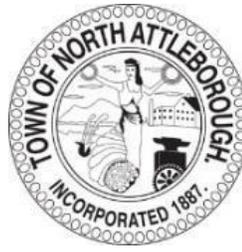


John Donohue - Chair
Tasha Buzzell - Vice Chair
Melinda Bernardo Cuerda - Secretary
Laura Wagner
David Sequeira



Town of North Attleborough
[Charter Review Committee](#)
43 South Washington Street
North Attleborough, MA 02760

02/27/2025 Minutes for the Charter Review Committee

Meeting called to order 6:30 PM

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

Members absent: Tasha Buzzell

1. **Pledge of Allegiance**
2. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. Motion by Sequeira to approve 2/20/2025 minutes. Seconded by Wagner.
 - i. Approved (4-0)
3. **Community Announcements**
 - a. none
4. **Resident and Community Comment**
 - a. none
5. **New Business**

interview with Debbie Clifton (DC), Library Director

Introduction

1. **JD:** Asks for an overview of the Library Director's job and its budget.
 - a. **DC:** Manages a staff of 16, oversees the budget, ensures the safety and welfare of staff and patrons, and runs daily operations (collections, programming, and services). Previously responsible for the building but that has now shifted to different department.
2. **JD:** Inquires about new programs
 - a. **DC:** Focused on expanding outreach, including a homebound delivery program and a book club at the Senior Center. Exploring library annex at 451 Elm.
3. **JD:** Asks about status of library renovation.
 - a. **DC:** Renovations are nearly complete, with the final punch list being addressed. The handicap ramp is now up to code. Notes that the town does not own the library building; it is leased from the Richards family.

Budgeting Process & Staffing Levels

1. **JD:** Asks about DC's experience with the budget process.
 - a. **DC:** Worked on the budget last year; found the process more extensive than previous experiences but appreciated that it was comprehensive.
2. **JD:** Asks about staffing levels.
 - a. **DC:** Notes that the library is fully staffed, though one position was adjusted to 19 hours. Indicates that staffing is appropriate.

Town Governance & Departmental Cooperation

1. **LW:** Asks for thoughts on how town procedures could be improved.
 - a. **DC:** Expresses appreciation for how the town functions, highlights cooperation among department heads and a lack of territorialism in budget discussions.

Procurement & Collection Development

1. **MBC:** Asks about DC's experience with procurement.
 - a. **DC:** Notes little direct experience with procurement.
2. **MBC:** Asks about the decision-making process for library collections.
 - a. **DC:** indicates that she works with librarians to select materials, but all final decisions go through her. If there is an objection to a title, there's process for handling complaints. Includes submission of complaint, discussion, and review by the Board of Trustees. If necessary, escalated to TM, though to date has not been needed.

Working with Board

1. **DC:** Notes it's first time working with an advisory Board of Trustees and that it works really well.
 - a. **JD:** Notes that committee is not recommending changes to the library's governance.

interview with Mark Hollowell - Director, Department of Public Works

Introduction

1. **JD:** Asks for intro and explanation of role.
 - a. **MH:** Director of Public Works for 18 years, managing water, sewer, drain, roadways, snow and ice, and solid waste. Oversees 75 employees, second largest department in town.
2. **JD:** Inquires about the biggest challenge.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that primary challenge is finding qualified personnel for upper management positions, esp water/wastewater operators. Relates this in influx into field in 80s, who are now retiring. To address, town beginning to collaborate with a school that trains wastewater operators.

PFAS & EPA Regulations

1. **JD:** Asks for clarification on regulatory issues, particularly with the DEP and EPA.
 - a. **MH:** Explains that engagement with DEP and EPA is critical, especially re: PFAS contamination. Estimates that the town has invested \$12 million, and has ~\$14

million more to address issue. Further notes that town has designed an upgrade, which puts us ahead of other towns.

2. **JD:** Asks about the EPA's role and future regulations.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that EPA issued rule last year to test for PFAS by January 2027, with full implementation by 2029. Indicates that town is prepared -- two plants currently below the mandated thresholds. Town has approx five years to meet future standards.
3. **JD:** Asks about the number of wells in town.
 - a. **MH:** Notes there are nine wells in total -- Plainville, Attleboro, and Mendon Rd.

Charter & Governance

1. **JD:** Asks whether the charter defines the relationship between the Town Manager (TM) and employees.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that charter gives the Board of Public Works some authority over personnel decisions, but certain responsibilities fall under TM. Notes there's a balancing act between the two.
2. **JD:** Asks about elected board and its interactions w/ TM
 - a. **MH:** Affirms that board is elected. Emphasizes that board only considers the interests of the enterprises (water, sewer, solid waste). Indicates that a TM could, for example, ask board to waive fees to encourage economic growth. MH sees his job as serving the ratepayers, not promoting growth.

Enterprise Funds & Budget Process

1. **JD:** Asks about enterprise funding
 - a. **MH:** Notes that water, sewer, and solid waste are funded by ratepayers, not through taxes. Provides example: dept needs new equipment. Cost is borne by ratepayers. Notes that budgets must be reviewed by BPW and with the town accountant, then there's a hearing to discuss rate changes.
2. **DS:** Inquires about deferred capital items and impact of charter on the process.
 - a. **MH:** Indicates that under the old system, the process was more convoluted. Now town has a working group that reviews capital programs. Believes training has improved how departments think about long-term planning. Notes that PFAS regulations are a concern because they require money, but that enterprises are all fine. Notes that solid waste enterprise has no debt.
 - b. **MH:** Notes that overall it's easier to have TM as a single point of contact to create consensus about what needs to be done
 - i. **MBC:** Asks why it's easier
 1. **MH:** Explains that CIP used to involve the Board of Selectmen, with several members serving on different committees. Now, it's easier to present the list directly to TM, who can downvote items. It has streamlined the process.

Procurement & Capital Projects

1. **JD:** Asks about the procurement process and the types of purchases made.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that DPW purchases wide range of things -- basic office supplies to large capital equipment and projects. Notes some large capital projects are outsourced to engineering firms. Indicates DPW does most contracts a year, and is close to what schools do.
2. **MBC** (later follow up Q): Asks about how process is working
 - a. **MH:** Indicates has extensive experience with contracts and has always done well with them. When the new administration came in, they switched from a local

- attorney to KP Law. Indicates that new firm pushed for using boilerplate contracts / had different attys on project, which led to issues. Gives example of contract confusion where a contractor left \$80k on the table.
- b. **MH:** Notes above issue has been addressed. Process now streamlined by using Teams for contract management and by having consistency in who is reviewing. Indicates there can still be smaller issues w/ legal (e.g. don't like the insurance), which can be addressed directly w/ them.
3. **JD:** Asks about use of OpenGov
 - a. **MH:** Notes they use it for other purposes and thinks it could also be beneficial for vendors to upload documents directly. Thinks it could streamline process, esp for permitting and public records requests. Thinks transition to OpenGov would be easy.

Governance and Board of Public Works

1. **JD:** Asks about differences in the role due to the charter.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that orig BPW had 3 members. Notes he didn't answer directly to them, but had to submit capital requests. Indicates that in old system the staff worked together well, but there was tension between different boards.
MH: Notes that when board was expanded to 5 members, but there weren't contested elections. This requires appointing people to fill board. He would like to return to 3 member board.
2. **MBC:** Asks if there are benefits to an appointed board.
 - a. **MH:** Indicates he does not think so. Believes the board should be elected, not appointed, to enable independent decision making on behalf of ratepayers, not other, possibly conflicting, needs. Notes that a town manager and the enterprises can have different interests. Provides example of pump station project and work to come to consensus to meet goals for both sides.
3. **LW:** Follows up about difference between 5 and 3 member board
 - a. **MH:** Indicates that board doesn't typically need to meet to evaluate decisions. Notes that with 3 member board, everyone was more engaged and took time to get up to speed.
4. **JD:** Asks about charter and budget process.
 - a. **MH:** Notes that process hasn't changed much for him, personally. Indicates that it's easier not having to go through the finance committee and now works w/ people who know his business

Closing Thoughts

1. **JD:** Asks for other thoughts
 - a. **MH:** Notes that planning board is an important entity and should have more autonomy from a TM. Notes they're doing a great job, but also believes members should be elected.
 - b. **MH:** Notes he's an at-will employee and believes this could make it harder to attract candidates reluctant to work without the protection of a contract. Indicates no personal interest in being under union contract
2. **LW:** Asks about professionalization of boards re: independence from a TM.
 - a. **MH:** Believes that planning board is excellent, Expresses concern that a TM can influence on board decisions though appointments. Gives hypothetical of not being reappointed, if not aligning w/ a TMs interests.

2. Old Business

Review proposed timeline submitted by L Wagner (All)

- a. Discussion of timeline, list of interviewees, and benefits of interviewing both dept heads and heads of board. Consensus on individuals to interview and overall proposed timeline
 - i. Action: MBC to work w/ Kerrin on scheduling
- b. Discussion of how to determine themes in what CRC has heard from different parties.
 - i. Action: CRC members to submit individual lists of themes/categories for group discussion by 3/20.
- c. **JD**: notes preference for having report writing be collaborative. TBD how to divide the work.

Discussion of proposed slides submitted by L Wagner (All)

- a. **LW**: Shares slides from Taylor intended for March 27 meeting.
 - a. Action: by Monday, review and comment if issues. Goal is to have these finalized by EOB Tuesday.
- b. **DS**: Notes that CRC section of website has limited information and suggests updating w/ relevant content.
 - a. **LW**: Notes that Taylor's email indicates she is also working on content for the website

c. Items Unforeseen by the Chair

- a. none

8. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn meeting by Bernardo Cuerda and seconded by Sequeira
Unanimous approval. The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Melinda Bernardo Cuerda, Secretary