

Apr 22, 2025

Town Manager Transition Committee, Town of Cranberry Isles

Attendees: Joe Connell, George Dickson, Ingrid Gaither, Nan Hadlock, Garth Hallberg, Jim Kehoe, Lauren Noether, Heather Spurling. All committee members present.

Meeting Minutes:

11:02am: Meeting is called to order, beginning with committee member introductions.

11:15am: Officers are elected.

Chair: Nan nominated George, Joe seconded the nomination. George nominated Jim, who respectfully declined. The committee proceeded to vote for George as chair, with all in favor.

Vice Chair: Jim nominated Lauren, Garth seconded the nomination. The committee proceeded to vote for Lauren as chair, with all in favor.

Secretary: Joe nominated Heather, Jim seconded the nomination.

11:22am: Discussion commenced. All discussion is paraphrased as accurately as possible by **Heather**.

Jim posed the first question: How does the committee vet information? Is there a disclosure aspect to the work the committee performs?

Joe responded to affirm that transparency is key, and that any meeting notes should be public.

Garth mentioned that it would be prudent to find a way to organize ourselves so as to not burden town officials with our documents.

Nan recommended that any collected data be sent to the Town Clerk, with Selectboard members CC'd on correspondence.

Lauren inquired about a tab on the town website that would include committee progress

George agreed to look into how to keep track of the committee's process, beginning with contacting Town Clerk Ben Sumner.

11:28am: Discussion transitioned.

Lauren asked about the 2003 impetus for looking into a Town Manager format of government.

Joe offered an explanation: recently, two Selectpersons resigned from duty within one year. There are also limitations to our present system of government. For example, Jim Fortune currently is the administrative assistant to the Selectboard, but does not hold any executive power. He continued to share info about the Maine Municipal Association (heretofore referred to as the MMA), a resource that in part outlines possible systems of government. The current system in effect for the Cranberry Isles is at the “primary” level: that of a three-member Selectboard with an administrative assistant. The “next level up” regarding government systems would be that of a Town Manager. In the past, discussion has included whether more Selectboard members would be worthwhile. However, it has been historically difficult for the town of Cranberry Isles to elect and employ three Selectboard members, let alone five.

Nan affirmed that a five member Selectboard has been voted down in the past. The Town Manager possibility was mentioned when a municipalities facility advisor was appointed (at an unconfirmed past date). She recommended that a specific job description be defined for the Town Manager role, suggesting that the committee look into Jim Fortune’s job description for reference. (Jim F. is the current administrative assistant to the Selectboard). Nan also pointed out that access needs to be approved for many functions of the MMA website.

Joe pointed out that Ingrid has access to the MMA site as a current Selectboard member. He recommended that the committee assign a point person to communicate with the MMA so that they don’t become inundated with correspondence from the same entity.

Lauren recommended that we designate said point person as an action item for today’s meeting

George re-centered the discussion by pointing out that a “problem statement” doesn’t currently exist regarding our current form of government. He recommended that we come up with a clear statement of inefficiencies- for example, what are we trying to fix, solve, or improve?

Joe agreed that that would be a good idea, perhaps for one of our future meetings.

Nan recommended that we come up with a “mission statement” rather than a “problem statement”.

Ingrid inquired about where the idea for a Town Manager came from. Some questions she posed included: Why was this committee formed? Who came up with the idea? Is something happening within town government that isn’t publicly known? She mentioned that she hasn’t seen discussion on this topic in previous Selectboard meeting minutes.

Joe offered some insight as a previous Selectboard member. In the past, there have been limits to the role of the Assistant to the Selectboard. As such, there have been frustrating issues in the past with getting things done quickly and efficiently as a Selectboard. Under the current system, there isn’t enough time to oversee or follow up on Selectboard tasks. He was careful to point out that “the system is the problem,” not the efforts of the Administrative Assistant. Joe postulated that there is too much going on for three Selectpersons to juggle, and that the current system has been in place for a long time and doesn’t seem efficient.

Garth summed up that the job description for a possible Town Manager might be similar to the Administrative Assistant's role, but with executive power. He went on to ask about potential pros, cons, strengths, and challenges to current and proposed systems of government for the Cranberry Isles.

Nan recommended that one of our first steps as a committee should be to educate ourselves on the differences between an open town meeting format of government, and a Town Manager format. She reiterated that current job descriptions are unclear, especially for the Administrative Assistant. She supposed that the Administrative Assistant's role should include supervising projects. She gave the example of the Harbor Committee, an entity that currently functions in an organizational role, but isn't always "listened to" by the Selectboard. Nan also mentioned that there seems to be a lot of potential overlap between Town Manager and Administrative Assistant roles.

Joe agreed with Nan, saying that there isn't room for both roles to exist. He also pointed out that the Cranberry Isles could have either system of government and still maintain an open format of town voting.

Nan wondered whether voters in the town might lose power if a new system of government were adopted.

Joe opined that nothing about having a Town Manager in government would go against open voting for the townspeople.

Lauren confirmed from a legal standpoint that voters can still speak directly.

Nan reiterated the importance of knowing the differences between government formats.

George summarized the discussion, agreeing that as a committee we should educate ourselves further on possible government roles and formats. What are the options? What are the roles? With a Town Manager, the role might be defined and balanced more easily than with the present system.

Nan mentioned that other Maine towns have given Town Managers different powers, usually stemming from a municipal charter, which the Cranberry Isles doesn't have

Ingrid requested that the committee designate pros and cons for our findings, citing the importance of having concise information to report at town meeting. She offered an example from another existing committee that is considering school consolidation, for which it seems that committee exists to affirm and support consolidation. She stressed the importance of remaining neutral in our committee, and avoiding criticism.

Joe brought the discussion back to the MMA and its role. He mentioned that we as a committee should talk with Ben Sumner or Katelyn Damon to get permission to contact the MMA and introduce ourselves and our scope of work. Joe recommended that George or Lauren, as Chair and Vice Chair respectively, might be our "point persons".

George asked whether MMA is an independent entity, or part of state government.

Lauren mentioned that in New Hampshire a similar association is independent, which is likely the case for Maine.

Joe confirmed that the Cranberry Isles asd a town is a member of the MMA

Jim offered information from the MMA website, including guides that exist for town meetings and other forms of government.

George inquired whether any committee members had worked with MMA in the past.

Nan said that she has worked with MMA, and that they provide a lot of training opportunities.

George asked whether the town pays an annual fee to the MMA

Nan affirmed that the Cranberry Isles pays a fee to the MMA. She recommended that we contact other coastal municipalities to ask about their job descriptions.

George asked whether she had any particular towns in mind

Nan mentioned that it might be worthwhile to contact Mount Desert, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Winter Harbor, and Gouldsboro as examples.

Lauren shared info from the MMA website, citing it as a voluntary, non-partisan non-profit which exists to assist towns with lobbying and other government functions.

Joe has had positive experiences working with the MMA in the past. He pointed out that they are willing and able to help us, but historically we as a town haven't reached out or attended trainings.

12:15pm: wrapping up the meeting

George summarized our next steps as a committee. We should start with an opportunity investigation, assigning pros and cons to each option.

Joe posed an action item of reaching out to the MMA.

Lauren agreed to be the point person and look into the MMA website.

Joe agreed to share any relevant info he has about working with MMA in the past

Lauren posed an action item to find out the Administrative Assistant's current job description. She also wondered how many employees the town of Cranberry Isles employs.

George asked whether it would be worth communicating with the Island Institute also.

Joe thought it would be worthwhile, as they might help with the community aspect of government. He agreed to reach out the Island Institute as an action item.

Nan mentioned that we need to be approved by a town official

Garth asked whether MMA could identify towns of a comparable size that have taken the Town Manager route of government. He also asked Ingrid whether her prior question about why this committee exists had been answered.

Ingrid said yes, in effect. She also pointed out that though we may have good intentions, we would benefit from more guidelines.

Jim offered more info from the MMA website, regarding easily downloadable forms that are available to the public.

Lauren mentioned that it will be important to keep notes when we as a committee communicate with other entities, for transparency purposes.

Joe pointed out that no reviews have been done in the past for current employees of the town. He clarified that the MMA is the only organization with which we need permission to engage with fully.

Lauren agreed to seek approval to communicate with MMA as an action item.

George agreed to look into the administrative assistant's job description as an action item.

Heather agreed to submit meeting notes this evening, along with a proposed agenda for our next meeting.

12:30pm: Meeting adjourned.

Joe moved to adjourn, Garth seconded, all members were in favor.

The next committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 29th at 4:30pm via Zoom.

Summary and Action Items

- Chair members were elected as follows:
 - Chair: George Dickson
 - Vice Chair: Lauren Noether
 - Secretary: Heather Spurling
- Action items agreed upon:
 - George will look into a method of keeping track of the committee's process, including contacting Ben Sumner
 - Lauren will seek approval to access all functions of the MMA website, and serve as point person between the committee and the MMA going forward.
 - Joe will contact the Island Institute to ask about resources for our research process.
 - George will look into the job description of the Administrative Assistant

- Our next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 29th at 4:30 pm via Zoom.