

Committee Meeting Minutes 4/29/25

Raw notes, unedited.

In attendance: Joe Connell, Lauren Noether, George Dickson, Garth Hallberg, Ingrid Gaither, Jim Kehoe, Heather Spurling.

4:36 Meeting Called to Order

4:38 First order of business: approve minutes Joe motion, Lauren 2nd, all in favor

George: Document tracking on town websites set up by Ben Sumner (short term housing for minutes and agendas, etc).

Joe: Any committee members can email Ben to upload relevant documents?

George: yes

Lauren: Include MMA document in that tab?

Joe: George, will you post job descriptions?

George: Action item: posting documents to the website

Jim: local governments of maine, ~60 page booklet

George: following up on action items. Lauren checking about MMA website access

Lauren: was given a username (katelyn's) wasn't able to get in but will try again. It would be wise to have something from the selectboard saying we have permission on behalf of the committee to call also. Now able to get in, but would like to have a contact person to call at MMA in the future.

Joe: Our representative to MMA from our committee should have those abilities, if the selectboard need to vote on that at a meeting, we can ask to get it on the agenda

Ingrid: next Selectboard meeting tuesday May 13th

George: Next step would be to find who is our contact at MMA and reach out to them.

Lauren: Town of Mount Desert moving away from town manager? Permission to contact Mt Desert.

Joe: Clarifying point of contact. 1: ask for email and phone abilities from MMA. Ask Katelyn?

Lauren: Action item to email Katelyn and cc George, also call MMA

Joe: in the past MMA has been good with answering phone calls and fielding questions, just make sure we are all on the same page.

Ingrid: Mt Desert town manager is retiring, possibly a parallel government

Jim: good data point- what is Mt Desert doing and why

Joe: we might need a listing where we can brainstorm who we talk to and reference whether they've been contacted. Central list with who we have talked to and what our progress has been

Heather: action item to create a document

George: meets our requirement for transparency

Lauren: other towns with populations of ~200 employ a town manager (Amity, etc)

Joe: we can likely get that kind of info from MMA. Divvy up the list between committee members and call different towns with common set of questions

George: Joe's contact with island institute

Joe: No-go. His old contact has left the organization, as has Ingrid's. Tried 4 different people at Island Institute. Will keep trying.

George: got job description of Admin Assistant. Reading the description, the concept of an AAS doesn't seem that different from a town manager, except for certain rights and responsibility. What is the key distinction?

Joe: holding executive privileges. Town manager can make decisions and take actions- authority to spend money, direct staff, etc.

George: went in person to talk to Jim F. about what is working well and what could be better.

Jim F: usually not a big deal for him to ask Selectboard to approve items. Bigger problem: given a small town and only one position, Admin assistant is wearing too many hats. Example, multiple docks and parking lots to keep track of. Gets lots of interruptions on related questions. Would be simpler if things could be delegated

New Business:

Garth: reading MMA 50-page doc about admin assistant: authority is given by the selectboard. Is there something that prohibits selectboard from giving authority to admin assistant?

Joe: It's unclear based on the language in MMA document. Where the distinction becomes helpful is in the clarity around being a Town Manager opposed to an Admin Assistant. Many hats inevitable? Part of getting stuck is being unable to make decisions or give direct answers. Are we in this pattern because of relationships? Or is it the system?

George: Jim F. has authority and discretion to spend up to \$5000

Joe: another example: road budget is approved at town meeting. All decision making had to go to selectpeople, whereas if there were a town manager they would manage that project and report back to the selectboard

Ingrid: saw on page 18/19 about commissioner. Has our town taken advantage of that role? History of having a road commissioner for the TCI, seemed like an elected position, maybe even a salaried position. Is that an option we could look into?

Joe: Key point/difference is in leadership. Having a town meeting means we are electing/hiring someone to be a leader. Admin assistant is helping leaders.

Jim: Mindset shift?

Garth: Follow-up: roads example helps clarify \$300,000 project, why we wouldn't have just an admin assistant manage a project that large Swans Island, North Haven, have Town Administrator. Clarifying pages 18/19

Joe: in that system, selectboard members are unpaid. About level of executive authority. Right now Jim F. has very little. Selectboard signs checks at the end of the day, even for expenses up to \$5000.

Ingrid: are these current or potential obstacles? Or is it a personality thing

Joe: Shoot from the hip: a problem in his mind because things don't get done and there is a lack of follow-through. Example: in the past funds have been approved for projects but there has been no follow through. It's about managing money and projects efficiently.

Ingrid: A personnel problem, not a government/fiscal problem? Would it be resolved by changing our form of government? Or by changing personnel?

Garth: Codify those as questions we are looking into as we talk to people such as MMA, Jim, neighbors, other islands... Question: is there a sense that inefficiency as it exists is causing tensions among selectpeople? Does it deter folks from wanting to step up?

George: Titles, executive authority, managing money, signing checks... some of which is being done already by selectboard. Not high level big-picture thinking currently, selectboard is caught up in tedium of administrative tasks. Can we shift duties around so that so much time isn't being spent on those details?

Lauren: made a list of what she thought town selectboards should be proficient at. Large scope of job. Needs to know all manner of things including... voting/voter requirements, budget process, health and public safety, municipal audits, HR, strategic planning, rotating equipment, bank account reconciliation...

Can easily get overwhelming, especially for 3 selectpersons. 3 is still the minimum required for our form of government. More liabilities in this day and age, and other things to be considered. What would I need to know in order to manage a town? Professional managers that supervise daily operations seem worthwhile, is curious to see whether Mt Desert is abandoning town manager or just seeking to replace a retiring manager. Can we write our own job description for a town manager? Who evaluates the town manager?

Joe: What is the selectboard doing, what is their real job? Day to day tasks. Frustration as previous board member: wasn't able to focus on the bigger picture. Job descriptions have been nebulous. Many things could be focused on by selectboard if day-to-day items were managed by someone else. What are we asking of an Assistant to the Selectboard? What would be asking of a Town Manager? A major limit of selectboard is that no two members of selectboard can have discussions about topics without an official meeting, it's illegal.

Ingrid: Unclear: is there a personnel problem or a job title problem? Fear of making a change is based on chit chat... Hiring the right person is crucial, no matter the job title. Will changing our form of government fix the issue, or will hiring the right people fix the issue?

Jim: Important to express frustrations with current system, and also look at different systems, regarding pros and cons for each system. Efficiencies of being able to pick up a "file", come to agreement, and execute on that topic in a shortened time frame. Seems easy for tasks to pile up.

On our islands, a challenge is enforcement. Ideas and statements are well and good, but how do things get enforced? As a community that self-governs, who wants to be the one to crack down? Example: recently an authorization was made on a Friday, work was done over the weekend, and things moved on! (CIRT)

George: One inefficiency seems to be currently that people can't make decisions or legally discuss topics long enough to get enough information to make decisions outside selectboard meetings. How can anything move forward without anybody doing anything? Seems like a built-in structural limitation.

Garth: Can we hear from voices outside of the committee? On the question of whether limitations are structural or personnel based? Some inefficiencies have value- such as the existence of this committee. This is direct democracy in action. Regarding selectboard meetings: seems like big picture items ____

Joe: Has seen many changes on the selectboard, every couple years there is a different group of board members. We have trouble finding people to run for selectboard office. Learning

curve for selectboard. How does the board even begin to have time and ability to establish whether we have the right people in the right places? Fundamental question being: we don't know whether we are employing the right people, and don't have the skills to figure that out.

George: some towns share a town manager. Another option that we haven't talked about. Currently we are in a learning phase.

Ingrid: Another avenue to explore! We have a precedent for that as a town with multiple islands, and as a town that shares a school system with multiple towns. Anxious to make contact with other towns and islands for what is working in other Maine towns.

5:42

George: What's next?

Heather: Start talking to other towns

George: each one of us as committee members came up with short list of things we ought to do that would move this committee forward- compare and contrast.

Joe: names of towns we might want to reach out to?

George: pros/cons, what are the options?

Garth: should we talk to other towns first, or should we begin by talking with community members?

George: both

Joe: we need our ducks in a row together better before we approach our communities

Lauren: Will send list of brainstormed proficiencies. "Right to know" law in NH: training that we should do through MMA regarding common questions and answers.

Ingrid: Tuesday, June 24th: 2-hour training offered by MMA

Joe: Top towns to talk to, top things to talk about: maybe too soon

George: still in a learning phase, educating ourselves

Jim: Is there a benefit in our learning process to interviewing people: I.e. Ben, Jim F., Denise, former selectpeople...

Joe: we'd be remiss to not do that, the important thing is when and how we invite or inquire of others.

5:54 Next meeting scheduled: Tuesday May 6th 11am

Goal: work towards every other week meetings, then once a month

5:58pm: Heather move to adjourn Garth second, all in favor

Action Items:

George: post to town website tab for committee with job descriptions

Lauren: email katelyn, cc george, call mma

Heather: create and share document

All: short lists of things we want to do moving forward- pros, cons, etc.