

Minutes
Kingston Town Government Study Committee
November 4, 2010
7:00 p.m.
Town House Room 203

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 7:03 p.m.

Members present: Keith Elder, Jean Landis Naumann, Frances Hoeg, Bob Ward, Wendell Chamberlain, Mary O'Donnell, Ken Stevens, Richard Dennehy

Members absent: Paul Tura

Others present: Mary Lou Murzyn, Priscilla Palombo, John LaBrache

On a **motion** by **Mary O'Donnell**, **seconded by Ken Stevens**, the minutes of the previous meeting were approved. The vote was 5 yes, 2 abstentions.

Appointment with Town Tax Collector, Priscilla Palombo (PP):

The Committee interviewed the Tax Collector, Priscilla Palombo. **Ms. Palombo** gave a presentation on the duties of her office. She gave a rating of 3 to the areas of coordination, communication, and cooperation between town departments. In the area of resources available to her department she gave a rating of 2.

In response to a question by **Richard Dennehy** on where the money goes that comes into her office, **Ms. Palombo** stated that past practice has been followed and that two accounts exist.

In response to questions from **Fran Hoeg** about the recommendations contained in the DOR report, **Ms. Palombo** explained:

- depositing money into the treasurer's account- past practice is followed
- special charges on the same bill- present practice helps the payer to divide the charges
- creating procedures for pursuit of delinquencies- no meeting has been held or scheduled at this time
- establishment of a Financial Management Team- has not been done at this time

On questions from **Richard Dennehy** and **Jean Landis Naumann** on the software used by the Tax Collector, Ms Palombo stated:

- Tech support is very helpful
- there are software modules from MUNIS that we own and are not using
- We do not utilize MUNIS to its full extent
- Tutorials exist online to help staff use the system

Jean Landis Nauman asked questions on billing by email, turnover sheets, and the use of a lockbox.

Ms. Palombo answered:

- Email is not used for billing. It is available to the Town for use, but costs and usage have not been explored at this time.
- A signature of acceptance from the Treasurer is needed before the Turnover Sheet is sent on to the Town Accountant.
- The Lockbox is a work in progress. Some questions about lockbox use that need to be addressed are: how does a resident note requests for posting of money they pay to designated accounts? What is the expense of installing a lockbox, some suggestions have been around \$2000.00.

Wendell Chamberlain asked about Recommendation #18 Delay of End of the Month Reports.

Ms. Palombo - The present process has been in place for 10 years, it works and is manageable. It allows reports to be done in a timely manner.

Robert Ward - Who handles control of MUNIS?

PP- MUNIS contract is under the control of the Board of Selectmen with the Town Accountant as the

point person

RW- Is it possible to give the Town Accountant the Turnover Sheet at the same time it is given to the Treasurer?

PP- Yes, but this request has not been presented to the Collector's office.

Ken Stevens- Where is the budget for MUNIS?

PP- The Board of Selectmen's budget contains funding for MUNIS

Keith Elder- How can communication rating move from a 3 to a 4?

PP:

- There is a presumption of how departments work without actually knowing how departments work
- know your job, know your product, and don't pass off to other departments
- monthly meetings between departments would be critical to improving communication
- departments that work together should meet frequently.

Appointment with John LaBrache, Treasurer:

The Committee met with **John LaBrache (JLB)**, Treasurer. Mr. LaBrache explained his duties and gave an overview of his office:

- Cash manager for the Town, handling about \$40,000,000 from the Town, CPA funds of \$3,000,000 and trusts of \$3,000,000
- Uses Municipal Finance from MGL as his "bible"
- Assistant Treasurer handles cash management side of the house. Funds are deposited 3 times a week. handles tax titles
- Signed sheets for turnover are given to the Town Accountant after they have been verified
- Local receipt policy has been put in place
- Office manager is also on staff. Main duty is payroll- town employees are paid weekly, schools employees are paid biweekly.
- Would like to have all employees on biweekly payment system, but this needs to be negotiated. Also would like to encourage direct deposit for all employees. Presently 45% of employees are not on direct deposit.
- Treasurer handles employees benefits, vendor check payments, inspection accounts and borrowing
- Trust Funds are all managed by Rockland Trust

JLB commented on the DOR Report:

- Some discrepancies exist in the report
- Selectmen only receive a total for the payroll, not individual amounts. This present system does work. If there was a discrepancy in a departments payroll they would be notified. The Harper's system presently in use seems to be working well.
- Tax Title backlogs are being addressed. Since July 1, 2010, \$200,000 has come in. Begin with properties without homes. Process in land court can take up to a year and a half, so it is beneficial to try to get owners to give land to the town rather than take them to court. Land assessed at \$19,000 or less can be taken under land of low value.
- Agrees with the recommendation that elected officials should not serve on committees
- payroll certification goes through the Town Accountant- data goes from Treasurer to Harpers to the Town Accountant and then on to the Selectmen

On combining the Treasurer and Tax Collector:

- Agrees with the recommendation. The checks and balances would still exist. Town financial departments would be more efficient
- Both offices need to be prepared for the transition
- Timing would be critical, as you cannot force someone out of elected office
- Certain duties would need to be moved to other offices- payroll to Town Accountant, Financial Director to Town Administrator, clerks would need to take on more responsibilities, An assistant treasurer and an assistant collector would be needed.

- Position could be appointed, but should be elected at first

JLB's ratings for Cooperation, Coordination, Communication and Resources:

- Cooperation has improved. It was a 1 but now could be considered a 3
- Resources for the Treasurer's office are adequate, Collector needs more
- Communication is a 3. There have been no Financial Team meetings. The Treasurer has assumed many tasks that used to be handled by the previous Town Administrator.

Chairman's Report:

The next meeting will be with the Finance Committee.

Jean Landis Naumann and Keith Elder will compose the letter mentioned in the minutes of 10/21/10 for Committee review on 11/18/10.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee hold forums on: elected vs. appointed, policies and procedures, and a general open forum.

On a **motion by Richard Dennehy, seconded by Robert Ward**, the committee voted to adjourn at 9:45 p.m. The vote was unanimous.