

**Structural Change Impact Group
Revenue, Budget and Services Working Group**

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, April 9, 2021

Location – Remote Meeting on Zoom

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: April 22, 2021

TIME: 9:10 AM

Members present: Anne Helgen, Matt Gasbarro, Vicki Amalfitano, Joe Bernard

Members absent: none

Other attendees: Phil Thayer

[Meeting called to order at 8:03am]

Updates on Researched Ideas and Discussion on Research Process

- Vicki Amalfitano updated on her research of MA towns opening and operating town owned liquor stores. To do so would require changes in MA state law about alcohol beverage control and a restructuring of how the current liquor license owners would operate. The current licenses in the entire state would need to be revoked and the state would have to distribute the alcohol. Matt Gasbarro mentioned that there is significant cost in operating the stores and so revenue is not the only factor. Idea status and scoring updates were made according to 2021-04-09_SCIG_RBS_Projects.xlsx
- The group discussed exchange of ideas between working groups and whether ideas that are marked “Completed” needed to be scored. Vicki Amalfitano will follow up with Travis Franck, Chairperson of the Structural Change Impact Group
- Matt Gasbarro updated on his research of towns implementing different residential rates on property tax, such as residential exemptions. He referenced a local article that stated implementing a residential exemption comes with administrative costs that make implanting an exemption prohibitive since its revenue neutral to the Town. The group recommended a follow up with the town assessor on the impact of implementing a residential exemption. No scoring was conducted.
- The group discussed the process for when to score ideas. The concern was in the slow process for evaluating ideas and if they were not scored when discussed, the evaluating process would take too long. Joe Bernard suggested that the group score ideas independently for review at the next meeting so that the process of scoring ideas is expedited.
- Joe Bernard updated on his research of the property tax abatement for seniors. He confirmed that the Town implemented actions to increase opportunities for senior tax relief by lowering the interest rate from 8% to 4.5% after Town Meeting 2018 approval and the Select Board raised the senior work-off allowance from \$1000 to \$1500. Anne Helgen commented that this idea is more informational than structural but is worth following up with Council of Aging and Town Treasurer for ways to improve awareness.
- Matt Gasbarro raised a point that if the RBS working group wanted to create a town survey for town services and fee structures, that the process should start soon so to include

pamphlets in town utility mailings. Anne Helgen mentioned that a town survey for services may be best at the next town forum. Vicki Amalfitano offered to coordinate with Travis Franck and the Structural Change Impact Group at large to discuss the best approach at a town survey.

- **Discussion on Grant Writing**

- On the issue of grant writing, Anne Helgen wondered if each working group is looking into grant writing ideas based on the idea's corresponding department such as energy related ideas or are they all the purview of our working group. She also questioned if it was more efficient to contract out grant writers with specific expertise on the underlying grant topic. Vicki Amalfitano also questioned whether a full-time grant writer could reap in identifying all the grants. Anne referenced a comment by Phil Thayer that towns contract with grant writers who are paid from the proceeds of the respective grant. The group decided to discuss the matter of grant writers with the Town Administrator to determine the best practice for employment status and whether they work on departmental or town-wide grants. The group also stated a next stop of researching with area towns for their hiring process. Vicki Amalfitano mentioned that a way to evaluate grant writer return on investments is calculating their cost against the proceeds received from their grants.

Public Comments

- Phil Thayer stated Susan McPhee of Winchester is a consultant to her town and runs a group of part time consultants to area towns at a consulting fee of \$20,000 per year. The fee is reimbursable from the grant and typically bring in \$250,000 in grants. The consultants also assist in implementing the actions needs as a result of the grant.

- **Discussion on Unexplored Ideas**

- On the issue of tax assessments, Matt Gasbarro suggested this was not a structural change matter since it changes the proportion of the revenue from taxes, not the overall amount. Joe Bernard raised the point that sentiment does matter in voting for overrides so a case can be made that there is a financial impact. The group agreed this was an informational issue and we should note it as such. Furthermore, informational issues should be collected and reviewed at a later point for best method to raise awareness on their respective ideas.
- On the issue of supply management, Matt Gasbarro agreed to assignment of the issue. Consultation with the Town Administrator and town departments is needed for assessing supply management process. Anne Helgen remarked that the new procurement manger the Town was looking to hire might oversee supply management. Follow up is needed.
- On the issue of town insurance, the group decided a consultation with the Town Administrator is needed to inform on the current process of procuring insurance and whether it could be bid out. Anne Helgen suggested splitting this idea into parts, the town side for our group, and the Consolidation and Outsourcing group handle the idea of seeking a discount by coordinating with other towns.
- On the topic of parking fees, Matt Gasbarro will report on current parking fee listings for the town. Joe Bernard volunteered to research parking fees from other towns. Anne Helgen mentioned prior hesitancy from the Town on using parking meters with payment by app

capabilities. Matt Gasbarro remarked that it is now so common that payment by app is an expectation and should be enabled for all future meter installations. Anne Helgen raised a concern that often cars park on neighboring streets to avoid parking fees. The group agreed a consultation with the Town Treasurer is warranted.

- On the impact of leaving Civil Service, the group agreed to wait for the town study on its impact before proceeding further. The group agreed a consultation with the Town Administrator is warranted.

Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn by Anne Helgen, *(Vote 4-0 in favor)*
 - Seconded by Matt Gasbarro
 - In favor: Vicki Amalfitano, Joe Bernard, Matt Gasbarro, Anne Helgen
 - Opposed: none

[Vote to adjourn was unanimous; the meeting was adjourned at 10:00am]