

--- On **Mon, 3/23/09**, **Valerie Bernier** <vbernier@townofpalmer.com> wrote:

From: Valerie Bernier <vbernier@townofpalmer.com>

Subject: Selectmen vs town manager

To: palmerchartercommission@yahoo.com, Pburnswoc@yahoo.com, ajmaz@comcast.net, duda@partrex.com, cfabbate@yahoo.com, raydomey@comcast.net, fitzfitz@comcast.net, mistfarm@comcast.net, p.wisnewski@att.net, davidewhitney@yahoo.com

Date: Monday, March 23, 2009, 5:31 PM

As Town Finance Coordinator and Accountant I have been asked to express my views on the Selectmen vs Town Manger issue. Although I do not like to get involved in politics, and am not available Tuesday night I am sending this email in response to that request.

I have worked for Selectmen for six years now in another town and have had numerous discussions with Accountants in other towns regarding their experiences with Selectmen. Since Selectmen are elected, they need no real knowledge of town government; the individual responsibilities of the departments, or of their own responsibilities. Since they are up for re-election every three years, there is a great deal of turnover. Some come with their own agenda which is other than the well-being of the town, and by their second year in office the power of the position can get to their heads. It is possible for them to make some very bad decisions as a board by not having enough information. Of course there are a few Selectmen that care about the town and are there to serve the people, but it seems to be the exception, rather than the rule.

I prefer to work for a town manager who knows what they are doing and is involved in the day-to-day workings of the town hall so they understand the issues. Elected officials who meet occassionally (even weekly), can't possibly make informed decisions on everything that goes on without a lot of intentional study of the issues and discussions with all those involved. Part-time elected officials don't always seek out all the information, whether due to their busy lives or lack of opportunity. At least a town manager is present five days a week and knows the issues. The town council form of government allows more flexibility than the town meeting format. Special town meetings can be costly, and how often do you want to call a town meeting? Generally at town meetings there are a few people present who want to argue till the cows come home, whether it is relevant or not. The town council and town manager format seems to be a much more efficient form of government.

I think part of the problem is that everyone is not really clear on exactly what their role is. If the council replaces town meeting, they should not be directing the day-to-day decisions of the town hall. If the town manager replace the Selectmen, he should have the authority to make the day-to-day decisions without interference. Since the council hires and fires the town manager, they virtually have control of everything. So who makes sure they don't overstep their powers?

The issue seems to be autonomy for the town manager. There is no provision for protection for the town manager when he makes decisions that disagree with the council. In the case of removing a Mayor, the city council would be required to have cause, then hold a public hearing and written notice would have to be given 14 days prior (MGL 39 ss. 8A) . In the case of Selectmen there are procedures that must be followed. So Selectmen are pretty secure in their decisions, at least for the term of their election, as are the council members.

There lies the problem, the body that has all the authority to approve, also controls the person who recommends action to them. In the case of Selectmen, they are voted in by citizens in an election - not by town meeting approval. Perhaps the employment of the Town Manager should be approved by some other board than the council. Otherwise, why not just make the position a Town Administrator who reports to the council? In which case, the council would be taking the role of Selectmen.

This email is only my opinion, and for your information only - not to be made public. Thank you, Val Bernier

--- On **Thu, 3/26/09**, **Valerie Bernier** <vbernier@townofpalmer.com> wrote:

From: Valerie Bernier <vbernier@townofpalmer.com>

Subject: email re: Selectmen vs town manager

To: palmerchartercommission@yahoo.com, Pburnswoc@yahoo.com, ajmaz@comcast.net,
duda@partrex.com, cfabbate@yahoo.com, raydomey@comcast.net, fitzfitz@comcast.net,
mistfarm@comcast.net, p.wisnewski@att.net, davidewhitney@yahoo.com

Date: Thursday, March 26, 2009, 11:11 AM

I understand there was a lot of discussion in regards to my email at the last meeting. It was not my intention to create a problem. My only concern was that some of the things I said would be misinterpreted. If this is read along with it, I think it will clear things up.

It was not my intention to imply that Selectmen or council members are not doing a good job. They all give up time from their families and lives to serve their communities. I merely meant to say that there is a need for checks and balances in government, and a balance of power. Perhaps some measures should be put in place to ensure this.

Thank you, Val Bernier