

General Government

Minutes for 8/1/22

1 & 2. Roll Call:

Voting: Clrs Gus Steeves, Jasmin Rivas; Cit Mem Denise Clemence, Martena Shea. Absent Clr Jackie Ryan.
Others: TM Michael McCall, Clrs Mike Marketti, Dave Adams, John Daniel, Scott Lazo; Citizens Maureen Doyle, George Chenier, Dave Smick.

Meeting began about 7:30 PM due to PPP's length.

3. GG minutes 6/22/22: Still not done. Postponed.

4. GG minutes 7/19/22: No corrections. Motion to approve Clemence/Rivas. Passed 3-0-1 (Shea abstaining).

5. Cook & Co agreement: Mr McCall suggested postponing until next GG meeting. He said it came up at the IAC and members had questions, including fact text is identical to what we approved last year re: renewable for two years. He wants to do a little research to see what other firms offer and solicit for services, but has also used Cook & Co in Chelmsford. Motion to postpone to next meeting before 8/31 expiration date: Clemence/Shea. Passed 4-0.

6. Discuss GG priorities: Clr Steeves read off a list of possible ideas, including various bylaws, charter and rules to work on. Some discussion on which might have to go to other subcommittees, although Mr Smick noted GG has right to review all bylaws. He suggested reviewing town financial procedures. Ms Clemence noted the council chair appoints charter and bylaw review committees and is already looking at charter changes. She suggested GG meet more regularly.

Clr Rivas suggested working to get more people involved and clarifying who can/can't be on town boards; that sparked interest in doing training on conflict of interest, open meeting law and related issues. Clr Adams noted there was some talk 2 yrs ago about clarifying what each subcommittee actually handles. He also said he'd like to see better "checks and balances" to avoid having the "same debates" repeatedly at subcoms and full council and ensure subcom minutes get done properly.

7. Continue drone policy/bylaw discussion: Ms Clemence noted other communities we have info on so far (Holyoke, Chicopee, Newton) cite federal law, but we need more research to see how far we can go. She asked where town residents as a whole stand, noting people haven't raised the issue at meetings. For the town itself, she wondered if we need extra insurance and should have "zero tolerance" for improper usage.

Ms Doyle sees police/fire use as "slippery slope," where seeing them will encourage private people to get them (she noted library gave one away as a prize last year) and need to have law in place because the tech is changing so fast. Mr Smick noted state has no law about it as of last week; Clr Steeves said there's a bill to address it, but didn't know where it stands. Clr Rivas said town use and public use are two separate issues. Town should have one for safety issues/search and rescue, but also need to let public know all equipment can have liability and need regulations.

Among the issues raised were: need to avoid damage to and misuse over private property, protests and other legal gatherings; penalties against use to check on off-duty/sick employees; training appropriate town staff to sue them so the police/fire chiefs aren't the ones doing it; fact we already get drones here fast when needed.

When asked, Mr McCall said he didn't know if Chelmsford had a policy, but didn't have a bylaw. He cited the "Open Fields Doctrine," by which police don't need warrants to act if they see something while flying overhead, but wasn't sure where that stands now. He sees them used often, with prices falling and availability rising. He suggested starting with a policy about use on town land, over public events, watershed, etc, that includes privacy concerns.

Ms Shea thinks we need a policy/bylaw even if it's hard to enforce because some people "will use them to annoy their neighbors" and there are "bad people using them."

Adjourned 8:40 PM.

*Respectfully submitted,
Chair Gus Steeves*