

# THE STRAIGHT SCOOP ABOUT WELLESLEY GOVERNMENT

**FICTION: No one is in charge.**

***FACT: To say there is no one in charge is simply not accurate.***

- The Selectmen are the executive officers of the town. They are now and will remain ultimately responsible for the town.
- The Executive Director currently has authority consistent with many town administrators:
  - Coordinates the capital and operating budget process for the entire town;
  - Determines bond financings for the town;
  - Negotiates union contracts;
  - Manages funding of the town's pension and post-employment obligations;
  - Oversees negotiations of employee benefits.
- The elected boards are in charge of delivery of specialized services (Schools, library, DPW, NRC, etc.)
  - The focus that the individual boards bring to their departments is a major reason why the town offers superior services across the entire spectrum of municipal services.
  - When projects involve more than one department, there is a proven track record of support and cooperation. Claims of silos are made without any examples.

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**FICTION: Volunteer boards cannot supervise or evaluate professional department heads.**

***FACT: We hope this assumption is wrong since under the proposed Town Manager system, the Board of Selectmen, a volunteer board, will be expected to supervise and evaluate the Town Manager.***

- Most non-profit institutions rely on their volunteer board to hire, supervise and evaluate operational leadership. It is a proven model throughout the country.
- Problems of late evaluations, which include the Board of Selectmen, and other minor issues can be corrected without restructuring the government.
- We have no record of employee departures or turnover that would indicate structural problems with employee policies.

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**FICTION: The current government is fractured and inefficient, thwarting the achievement of excellence.**

***FACT: Municipalities that are fractured and inefficient do not receive AAA bond ratings, operate one of the best school systems in the state or develop award winning libraries.***

- The Town works well; there is no demand for better services leading to the Town Manager proposal.
- Initial study of government presented as a routine ten year review; it was not brought about due to any allegation of wrong-doing, or any citizen-led complaint.
- We have been shown no examples of sub-standard performance.
- No examples of inefficiencies have been presented to us.

**Get the facts at: [www.SaveWellesleyTownGov.org](http://www.SaveWellesleyTownGov.org)**

**FICTION: A Town Manager will bring the budget under control.**

***FACT: Town Meeting is required to pass a balanced budget each year. Any growth beyond the 2½ % cap is a result of citizen-approved increases.***

*There are no identified areas for cost control suggested by the Study Committee.*

- The combined budgets of the additional departments that would come under the Town Manager are \$12 million out of a total budget of \$152 million. Our Executive Director is already responsible for \$73 million, including general government services, public safety, employee benefits and capital/debt.
- These additional department budgets (DPW, Library, Rec, BOH and NRC) have grown at less than 2.5% per year for the last 20 years.
- The drivers of the town's budget increases of \$100 million over the last 20 years are:
  - **Schools** (\$43 million increase) due to a 30% increase in school aged children; cost of Special Education, an unfunded state mandate; and new program initiatives approved by the voters in overrides;
  - **Capital and debt** (\$16 million increase) growth due to new high school, acquisition of North 40 and 900 Worcester, and deferred maintenance on town buildings;
  - **Employee benefits** (\$23.5 million increase) due primarily to the increased cost of health insurance.
- School budgets are the responsibility of the School Committee, not the Town Manager. Debt has already been incurred and must be paid. Employee benefits have risen for everyone and the town has taken many initiatives to reduce their costs.

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**FICTION: No one has final authority over the budget.**

***FACT: Town Meeting currently has the final authority over the budget and will continue to have that authority.***

- If the Town Manager has the final authority, the downside is that **all boards, including schools**, will be subject to line item veto in preparing final budgets.

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**FICTION: A town manager will provide professional, consistent supervision of town employees.**

***FACT: Department heads are now and will continue to be responsible for the supervision and professional growth of the employees under them.***

*The Town Manager will have 19 direct reports, too large a number to expect significant mentoring.*

- Supervision of some department heads will be delegated to deputies, who may not provide consistent supervision and who will add another layer of bureaucracy and permanent cost.
- Town Manager will appoint the HR Director and he/she will propose policies to HR Board, which will not have independent authority. There will be no independent review of how Town Manager deals with personnel issues and so no assurance Town Manager will be professional or consistent.

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**FICTION: The new government will be more transparent.**

***FACT: The new government will not be more transparent because the bulk of the decision-making authority will be in the hands of a person not subject to Open Meeting laws.***

- The Executive Director must now bring matters to the Board of Selectmen for decisions in a public session, with an opportunity for Citizen Speak. A Town Manager can make most decisions without a public meeting.
- The meetings of the boards may be public and televised, but the boards are no longer the decision makers.
- The form of checks and balances may remain by having elected boards but the vitality will diminish since the boards will not control the tools (staff and budget) to implement their missions.

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**FICTION: The new government will be more participative.**

***FACT: Participation depends on whether people think their involvement will make a difference. Boards under this structure are advisory only. People who have given so much of their time are likely to take their talents elsewhere to have more impact.***

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**FICTION: There are new checks and balances in the town manager proposal.**

***FACT: The checks and balances are weak and subject to further erosion.***

- There are three checks: Human Resources Board, Advisory and Town Meeting.
  - HR is a rubber stamp. It can take no action without the prior recommendation of the HR Director, who will be appointed by the Town Manager.
  - The role of the Advisory Committee is not spelled out at all. It is intended that the Town Manager will present all budgets to Advisory. Without a clear role articulated in the bylaws, its traditional role of full and thoughtful review can be marginalized.
  - The Town Meeting is to receive all budget information from the Town Manager. Unless an elected board decides to challenge the recommendation of the Town Manager on the floor of Town Meeting, a move that would have significant political consequences, Town Meeting is not going to get as much information about budgeting or programming that it has in the past, information that is essential for Town Meeting to make informed decisions.

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**FICTION: Long term planning is ineffective and lacks town-wide vision.**

***FACT: Town Meeting has concurred that the Board of Selectmen should develop a long term strategic plan, which can be achieved through an amendment to the bylaws; it does not require restructuring the government.***

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**FICTION: The proposal is the result of an extensive and thoughtful process.**

***FACT: The process was not extensive or thoughtful for anyone other than the nine appointed members of the TGSC.***

- The TGSC failed to explain to Town Meeting the many possible options it had to centralize decision making;

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- The TGSC failed to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each option.
- There were no transcripts or summaries of the interviews it conducted.
- The TGSC failed to interview department heads, selectmen, or other elected board members working under a town manager to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the model.
- They failed to explain the different processes available to the town to change its government, some of which are far easier to implement and amend than the option it selected.
- It oversimplified the forms of government of our peer communities, many of whom do not have a town manager, but a town administrator whose authority is very similar to the authority Wellesley vests in its Executive Director.
- The proposal represents a dramatic change from Wellesley's current decentralized structure. The process did not offer Town Meeting members and citizens enough time to learn about and study what was being proposed, what the alternatives were, and the implications of all the options.

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**FICTION: The Town Manager will have extensive education, training and experience.**

***FACT: Given the extent of opposition to this model by current elected boards, former Selectmen, School Committee members, prominent Town Meeting members, and Advisory Committee members, Wellesley may not be able to attract a strong candidate.***

- A successful town manager is unlikely to move to a new position unless there is a strong likelihood that he or she will be successful in the new setting.
- The pool of candidates for town manager positions is shrinking according the Collins Center at U Mass.
  - Other towns have had serious problems with their town managers, leading to early terminations and extensive payouts of contracts, for example Winchester, Cohasset, Wayland, and Stoughton.

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**FICTION: The current system hinders citizen input.**

***FACT: Citizens can attend any board meeting and speak to the elected board members during Citizen Speak. If the citizens are dissatisfied with the response of the board, they can, and do, find a candidate to run against an incumbent to change the composition and decision making of the board.***

- The Town Manager does not have a Citizen Speak. He or she may make decisions without citizen input.
- If citizens are unhappy, their only recourse is to complain to the Board of Selectmen. There is no direct accountability to the citizens. There are likely to be many poor and dispiriting decisions made before any Board of Selectmen will take action against a Town Manager.
- Citizens can still speak directly to the elected boards, but they have no power to change the directives made by the Town Manager.

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**FICTION: The town manager will streamline bureaucracy.**

***FACT: No examples are given as to areas where the Town Manager could institute efficiencies. There will be more generalists on the payroll with less understanding of the specific needs of different departments.***

**Based on this evidence, a majority of all current elected board members, many former elected and appointed town officials—including past Selectmen, Advisory chairs, and School Committee chairs—as well as many concerned citizens oppose the Town Manager proposal.**

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