

**Town of Wrentham
General By-Law Review Committee**

Description of Project to Review, Standardize, and Update By-Laws for Committees

[NOTE: This document, seeking their input, was sent to every standing committee of the Town, together with: their enabling statutes (if applicable); the General By-Law Review Committee's draft of proposed amendments to ARTICLE 2.40 COMMITTEES that would apply to every committee; and, a mark-up of their current by-law (for the thirteen committees that are addressed in the Town's by-laws) showing how our proposal to refine ARTICLE 2.40 COMMITTEES would affect them, or a draft by-law for the committees that are not presently addressed in the General By-Laws.]

A. Why have we undertaken this project?

The General By-Law review Committee has identified several deficiencies in the bylaws:

- 1) The by-laws provide only limited transparency in the operation of the town government. Although we have twenty six standing committees, all of which were created or accepted by Town Meeting, only thirteen committees are defined by the by-laws.
- 2) Administration and interpretation of by-laws that define committees is hampered by provisions that are not consistent or which are lacking. For example, every committee elects its own chair, but the by-laws for only seven committees address electing a chair, and each is phrased differently.
- 3) There are seven ARTICLES that include severability clauses that apply to only the content of those ARTICLES. However, the bylaws lack a general severability clause that applies to the entire set of bylaws.
- 4) Many bylaws do not specify the person or committee that is responsible for enforcement.
- 5) Some bylaws specify fines for violation of those by-laws, but there are no penalties for violating many of the by-laws.

We are addressing these deficiencies by currently working on the first, second and third points described above. We will work on the third and fourth points after the current project is complete.

B. What are we doing?

We are standardizing the bylaws that apply to all committees. One goal is to increase the efficiency of each bylaw that applies to each standing committee by including only those matters that apply to that committee in that committee's by-law. Matters that apply to all committees should be located in an omnibus article (ARTICLE 2.40). Another important goal is to make the operation of our town government more transparent by composing bylaws that recognize every standing committee, and providing clarity where necessary.

We also want to acknowledge contributions that many members of committees have made to the way that Wrentham's citizens are served. Over time the role and responsibility of each committee may have evolved, expanded, or become refined. This may require that the charge to a committee, as currently established in a by-law, be updated to reflect the way that our Town really operates. If the function of your committee has become greater or different than as currently stated in your by-law and results in a higher quality of life in Wrentham it should be formalized by amending your by-law.

The omission of a general severability clause is a risk to the town's ability to enforce many of the general bylaws. This gap should be filled by replacing the seven individual ARTICLES with a general ARTICLE.

Because the town has already addressed severability seven different but similar ways we are seeking the Town Administrator's and Town Council's opinions as to whether one of the existing ARTICLES can be applied to all of the General By-laws.

C. What is attached to this email?

Draft amendments to the general bylaws that are being discussed by the By-law Review Committee are attached. One attachment contains the amendments that we are proposing for ARTICLE 1.10. Definitions and Rules of Interpretation, ARTICLE 1.40. Severability, and ARTICLE 2.40. Committees. These articles will apply to all committees. The other attachment contains a proposed by-law for your committee if you are not already covered by a by-law, or if your committee is covered by a by-law, it contains your current by-law with amendments that are consistent with the proposed amendments to ARTICLE 2.40. The text of any relevant enabling statutes is also included for informational purposes.

Both attachments are Word documents that started as the current text of the by-laws, and includes all proposed amendments which are highlighted by using the track changes feature of Word.

D. What are we looking for?

We are asking for your comments and suggestions. Is the section of your by-law that defines your committee's role and responsibility accurate, current, and complete? Should additional topics be addressed in ARTICLE 2.40?

Please contact any member of the Committee if you have any questions, but call me (508-384-2562) or email me to confirm that the proposed amendments to your by-law are adequate, or with any comments or suggestions.

We plan to submit articles for the upcoming spring town meeting, so a fairly quick response will be appreciated. Please send me your comments, suggestions or confirmation before March 1. If the charter passes at the ballot, revisions to our proposed amendments that may be necessary to conform to the charter will be largely technical in nature and can be made quickly.