

CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING AND PUBLIC FORUM

JANUARY 26, 2016 FROM 7 PM TO 9 PM

ASHLAND HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA

Members present: Alexis Christopher, Betsy Emberley, Steve Greenberg, Joe Magnani, Ken Rush and Roberta Soolman

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Roberta Soolman, Chair, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. She also thanked the Ashland High School for the use of the space, Steve Greenberg and Alexis Christopher for providing the refreshments and KG Narayana for coming early to help set up even though he couldn't stay for the forum.

2. INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION

Roberta presented an introductory overview of the Charter Review Committee, its charge, and the purpose and format of today's meeting.

3. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS MADE BY THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE TOWN CHARTER

Part I: Division of Powers

- Which of three Town Local Government options is committee leaning towards?
 - Answer: at this time, none
 - Natick may change from Representative Town Meeting form to Open Town Meeting
 - Representative form has the same problems as Open Town Meeting
 - Some towns have Town Administrator versus Town Manager
 - Town needs to make concerted effort to get more individuals at Town Meeting
 - Do not limit attendance more by making it Representative
 - Should we consider electronic voting – has pros and cons
 - Special interest groups vote for one issue then leave the meeting; how do we engage them for other issues
 - Have we considered having Open Town meetings on Saturdays
 - Open Town Meeting form of government – fosters individuals getting involved

Part II: Legislative Branch

- Challenge to keep town meeting open
 - Expedient process versus legitimate time to discuss and debate
 - Hold multiple public forums to discuss controversial issues
 - Alternative: publish Pro's and Con's for major issues that need to come out in advance
 - Holliston – need to submit questions prior to meeting to moderator – they must be approved

- Different issue – committee spends 1 year, brings up an article, then someone from the floor comes up with alternative wording without coming to any committee meetings to voice concerns
- Goal should be democracy versus efficiency
- Need to mandate communication
 - Budget
 - Warrant articles
 - Public notices
- Make use of technology to communicate road maps
- Currently, forums held prior to Town Meeting are not open and transparent and squash questions
- Over last 21 years – there were only 4 times when Open Town Meeting lasted more than 1 night
- Town Moderator – responsibilities and authority at Town Meeting are covered by state law

Part III: Elected Town Officers

- Section 3-2: Board of Selectmen
 - Biggest issue
 - Selectmen’s job more involved
 - Takes a lot of time
 - Spreading them too thin
 - Need to make commitment more sustainable
 - Having competent individuals – takes some level of stress
 - Macro management
 - Right people in right positions makes it easier
 - Need to be careful not to get people who have specific interests or agendas
 - Need committed people
 - Leave the BofS as Water Commissioners
- Section 3-4: Town Moderator
 - Why does moderator select FinCom? – seems counter-productive
 - Alternative – may be moderator, Chair of BofS, chair of FinCom

Part V: Town Manager

- Section 5-6: Administrative Powers and Duties
 - Why is the Town Manager also the Commissioner of Police? Leave as is

Part VII: Financial Provisions

- Section 7-1: Budget Process
 - Currently, missing whole picture on financial obligations – example OPEB
 - When does it make sense to bond?
 - Need full transparency on financial issues
- Section 7-3: Capital planning

- Area of weakness
- 5 year plan not adequate – what does it take to bring everything up to code
- Need to get a consolidated plan
- Completely inadequate right now
- What are the financial needs to bring the town up to standards – infrastructures, buildings

Upon motion duly made by Steve Greenberg, seconded by Ken Rush and voted 6-0-0, the meeting and public forum were adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Alexis Christopher