

CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING AND PUBLIC FORUM

JANUARY 31, 2016 FROM 1 PM TO 3 PM

ASHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

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

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Roberta Soolman, Chair, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. She also thanked the Ashland Public Library for the use of the space and Steve Greenberg for providing the refreshments.

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

Overall Comments Re Charter:

- No big substantive things to change
- Copy of Charter given to each new resident
- Clarify issues in the Charter
- Charter – have people be able to hand out information – pro's and con's on issues
- Consider a Charter Light
 - Gap between citizens here < 5years and > 30 years
 - Overview not details

- Goal – increase empowerment of Ashland residents
 - Educate residents
 - What changes could be made to charter to improve this
 - People are powerless to address issues
 - People do not want more growth – how to get Planning Board to limit growth
 - Missing real comprehensive plan including resource planning
 - Gap – citizens' issues not being heard – voice of the people being ignored
 - Most people don't understand that Town meeting and government pertain to them

- Biggest challenge to town: town unclear what it wants town to be (e.g., industrial/ commercial mix versus bedroom community)

- Communication Problems
 - Website design
 - needed to ask major users – what are their visions for the town's website
 - need to know what their customers need

- needed more residents involved
 - very concerned with the process
- Documents are totally vague

Part II: Legislative Branch

- Town meeting
 - has same cast of characters
 - people need to know about charter
 - issue – getting more people to town meeting
 - getting charter out to all citizens
 - need to get email blast out
 - override may get more people involved
 - amount of discussion is based on confidence factor about each issue
 - budget – people more confident – little discussion
 - other items – not as confident – need more information earlier
 - hope the new website will help
 - DO NOT move from Open Town Meeting to Representative Town Meeting
 - Could lose some of the same citizens
 - Few people would attend
 - People – if they have no issues with articles – they don't come
 - Open Town Meeting – 2 sessions
 - Session 1 – all budget (money related items)
 - Session 2 – all other items
 - Town Meeting – want to have discussions
 - Representative Town Meeting would generate continuity and avoidance of special interests
 - Why can't people bring their own presentations to Town Meeting to support their side of issues
 - What about electronic voting from home – is this a bad idea?

Part III: Elected Town Officers

- Section 3-2: Board of Selectmen
 - More authority – less for Town Manager
- Section 3-4: Town Moderator
 - Has too much control at Town Meeting
 - Too much power at Town Meeting
 - Why does Moderator appoint FinCom?
 - Is the agenda of Town Moderator to be supportive of quickness or thoroughness?
- People – what do people want when they work on boards – need to work to identify people on boards – need talent – how do we do this

Part IV: Recall of Elected Officials

- Section 4-3: Recall Elections

- 25% seems excessive – revisit
- Difficult to implement
- Should use number of registered voters as a reference point
- Should be a higher hurdle for recall than for initial election

Part V: Town Manager

- Strong Town Manager
 - Reduces burden on BofS
 - Let's us outsource and hire professionals
 - How many towns have strong town manager?
- Do not want strong town manager
- Planning director – to whom does he report?
 - Some confusion when 2 masters (e.g., Planning Board, Town Manager)
 - In matrix, not hierarchical organizations, can have 2 masters
 - Issue with serving 2 masters
 - Promotion of Planning Director
 - Is assistant taking over planner responsibilities?

Part VI: Administrative Organization

- Section 6-2: Human Resource Management System
 - Needs to reflect what is currently being done
 - New HR director to be hired
 - New policy in process
 - Ask Town Manager for existing policy and policy in process
 - Appoint audit or post-audit committee to deal with HR issues
 - As an alternative – have key elected committees to do this
 - Committees – especially elected committees
 - Should draft a vision statement every 3 to 5 years to guide committee's work
 - Residents should review and approve at Town Meeting
 - Also goals & objectives

Part VII: Financial Provisions

- Section 7-4: Approval of Warrants
 - Define what is meant by warrant – confusion between “warrant” as in warrant article or “warrant” as in “warrant” against appropriated funds
- Question about money being spent without Town Meeting approval
- Concern about restaurant tax money now being spent on 4 things when initially approved for 3
 - Library
 - Senior Center
 - Route 126 Project – 25% design

- Cemetery Parks and Trees (not approved)

Upon motion duly made by Steve Greenberg, seconded by Ken Rush and voted 6-0-0 (Betsy Emberley left early), the meeting and public forum were adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Alexis Christopher