

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Minutes of Regular Meeting
Tuesday, July 1, 2014

Commissioners present:	Chairman Joseph Calsetta, Norman Boucher, Bill Hamel, Sara LeMaster, Brian Levy, Dave Ragon, Dave Vaicunas, George Austin, Doug Glazier and Lucinda Van Gieson
Commissioners absent:	Carl Schiessl

1) **Call to Order** – Chairman Calsetta called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

2) **Pledge of Allegiance** – The Pledge of Allegiance was observed.

3) **Public Input** –

Paul Harrington – 10 Meg Way – Mr. Harrington stated that he opposes the idea of all budget voting going to referendum. He also said he does not want a limit to the number of referendums that can be had, does not want a requirement set to determine the timeframe between referendums, and he does not want a default increase set after multiple failed referendums.

4) **Approval of the minutes for the Meeting of June 17, 2014.**

Approval of the minutes has been tabled until the Commission's next meeting on Tuesday, August 5. In the future, the recording secretary will email the minutes to the Commission members for their review prior to meetings.

5) **Correspondence** – No comments were made with regard to the correspondence distributed.

6) **New Business** –

a) **Discuss Timeline** - Commissioner Hamel gave an overview of the Charter Revision Timeline that was distributed earlier by email. He explained that we are now working on Step 3 of that timeline. He further explained that the timeline is driven by the 2015 municipal election which is held in November. He stated that the Commission has to have any questions that they want on the ballot sent to the Secretary of State by September 20, 2015. This is the date the Commission is starting with and working backwards from there in order to complete the remaining steps of the timeline.

b) **Discuss possible subcommittees** – Chairman Calsetta stated that he would like to review each section one at a time as a group and identify what can be taken care of right then and there (i.e. typos, etc.) and what issues need to be put on a list for further review by the whole group or subcommittees of the group. He would like this task to begin at the first meeting in September. Chairman Calsetta then stated that he would like to have their review of the Public's and Commission's comments completed by the September meeting, and complete the page by page review of the Charter by the end of March. This will allow a cushion of time should the review take longer than anticipated.

c) **Review/Vote – Consideration for all Budget Voting going to Referendum** –

Each Commissioner voiced their opinion:

Brian Levy stated that although he would like to see more attendance at Town Meetings, this is the way our Government has been run for years and he likes it this way.

Lacinda Van Gieson stated she has done some research and that some towns have a trigger that causes a referendum (i.e., too few people showing up at town meeting). She asked what the \$3,000 cost of a referendum includes. Chairman Calsetta answered that it includes advertising, salaries for the workers, supplies, etc. Elections that require tabulated ballots cost even more because you have to have a ballot printed for every registered voter in town regardless of how few show up to vote.

Dave Vaicunas stated that he is not in favor of automatic referendums. He feels that there should be some due diligence done that would trigger an automatic referendum before spending \$3,000 automatically. He asked about changing the number of people required to petition for a referendum. Bill Hamel Stated that 200 is a statutory number and cannot be changed.

Doug Glazier stated that he is in favor of automatic referendums because approving a \$46 million budget is very important and shouldn't be voted on by only a few people that come to town meetings.

Dave Ragon stated that he is not in favor of automatic referendums. He likes the concept of referendums and likes that people have the ability to get involved and petition for one.

Sara LeMaster feels that aiming for more participation in Government should be the goal. She stated that although town meetings are fiscally more responsible, she wondered if more people would actually turn out to vote if it was an automatic referendum.

George Austin suggested that whether or not a budget is voted on by town meeting or referendum should be determined by the amount of the budget increase. For example, if there is no increase then a Town Meeting is enough, if a large increase is in the budget, then a referendum would occur.

Bill Hamel stated democracy is a messy business. He stated there are two ways to go to a referendum now; 1) by petition, and 2) a budget defeated at a town meeting. He feels that the town meeting system has worked well for years and he prefers it. He does not feel that an automatic referendum will cause more people to vote. He believes that if the people care enough to vote, they will come out to vote whether it's a town meeting or a referendum.

Norman Boucher hears a lot about the "Good Ole Boys Network" making the decisions. He feels that \$3,000 is a small amount to spend when deciding on a large budget. He also added that the town meetings are over too quickly and that people coming in late may miss their opportunity to vote.

Chairman Calsetta recited the role and responsibility of the Charter Revision Commission. It reads "Solicit and incorporate any modifications to the existing Charter which would improve the functioning of town administration and governance. To identify and correct any weaknesses, inconsistencies, redundancies, or anachronisms to the existing Charter.

Chairman Calsetta continued by saying he likes the town meeting form of government and is against automatic referendums. He added that most of what he was hearing tonight is speculation of what could happen. He doesn't think there is anything they can do to force more participation by our residents. He feels our existing form of government is not broken and therefore does not need to be fixed. He continued by reciting the very low turnout of voters over the last 49 years.

A thorough discussion by all members of the commission followed. A compromise was suggested whereas they could keep town meetings open for an extended period of time to allow for residents to come in and vote at their convenience. Commissioner Hamel also mentioned that the state statute may be changing to allow for early voting. Unfortunately, we cannot allow this to occur until the statute is changed.

MOTION: A motion was made to keep the plan of action that is written in the Charter today as is – Town meeting form of government rather than automatic referendum.

Bill Hamel

Seconded by Brian Levy

Vote: 6 Votes in Favor (Bill Hamel, Brian Levy, Sara LeMaster, Dave Ragion, Dave Vaicunas and Lacinda Van Gieson)

3 Votes Opposed (George Austin, Norman Boucher, and Doug Glazier)

7) Old Business –

- a) **Review/Revise list for discussion** – Chairman Calsetta stated that we have completed and voted on Topic #1 this evening. He suggested #9 – consider making Town Clerk and Tax Collector civil service positions - be listed as a) under New Business on the next meeting agenda. Commissioner Van Gieson asked that Topic #6 – Blight Ordinance be added as b) under New Business. The actual task here will be to look into adding something to the Charter that would require a governing body to review ordinances within stated timeframes in order to keep Ordinances current. Chairman Calsetta also suggested the commissioners look into E-Codes which can be downloaded to their smartphones. E-Code Search allows access to view town ordinances. Lastly, he stated a more thorough discussion of the subsets under #1 Budget Voting (items ii, iii,) will occur when the entire Charter is reviewed.

8) Public Input (Agenda Items Only) - None

9) Commissioners Comments – None

10) Adjournment –

MOTION: To adjourn at 8:05 pm.

George Austin

Motion Passed Unanimously

Seconded by Norman Boucher

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharon Pfaffenbichler
Recording Secretary

Charter Revision Commission Meeting Agenda's and Minutes are available on the town website for downloading.

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

JUNE 17, 2014

(Revised after meeting to be discussed at July 1, 2014 meeting)

1. Consideration for all Budget Voting going to Referendum
 - a. Limits to number of Referendums
 - b. Length of time between Referendums
 - c. Set default increase after multiple failed Referendums
2. Combine Commissions (at least seven members each)
 - a. Police/Fire
 - b. Board of Selectmen/Board of Finance
 - c. *Open for additional Commission Consolidations*
- ~~3. Review wording of existing Charter for relevance to 2014 will happen automatically when Charter is reviewed~~
4. Clarify 805C
 - a. Increase the numerical threshold for new budget items
 - b. *Change the Charter to allow certain decisions be made by BOS rather than a Town Meeting (moved from above)*
5. Require the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Commissions to exchange roles yearly
- ~~6. Set stricter regulations for Blight Ordinance (changing to a more generic line item involving the review of all Ordinances by a governing body)~~
7. Change the term for First Selectman to four years.
 - a. Disqualify loser from automatic entry to the Board
 - b. Stagger election years for First Selectman and Second Selectmen
8. Clarify the independence of the First Selectman relative to the entire Board
9. Consider making Town Clerk and Tax Collector positions civil service
- ~~10. Update gender usage of "Selectmen" would have to be changed at State Level first~~
- ~~11. Consider adding more to the website, (i.e., notification of referendum) not a Charter issue~~
- ~~12. Fix spelling errors and grammatical errors in existing Charter will happen automatically when Charter is reviewed~~