

Board of Selectmen

Public Hearing on proposed Town Charter

July 21, 2022

Town Hall Gymnasium

First Selectwoman Paula Cofrancesco called the Public Hearing of the Board of Selectmen to order at 7:20 pm. In attendance were First Selectwoman Cofrancesco and Selectmen Donald Shea and Elizabeth Appel. Also present was Town Attorney Vincent Marino and approximately 25 members of the public.

First Selectwoman Cofrancesco gave a brief PowerPoint presentation about the charter process. This is the third public hearing held to date on the topic. Written comments were also submitted and will be attached to the end of the minutes.

Deanna Hale – Do we have a specific list of laws that we are concerned about the state changing?

First Selectwoman Cofrancesco – There are a number of things that we can't do because we have to rely on statute.

Attorney Marino – It could help preserve some of our practices going forward. For example, the May election moving to November may have been prevented if in charter.

Connie Royster – Is that a good example?

Attorney Marino – Yes.

Brad Buchta – Are there specific concerns that the state has proposed, but not yet passed?

Attorney Marino – The biggest issue on the horizon is zoning, but not directly related to charter. This is opportunity to codify how we do business.

First Selectwoman Cofrancesco – An example of what a charter can do is change terms for Board of Education and Board of Finance from 6 to 4 years. Board of Finance provided feedback that they want to keep it 6 years.

Steve Thornquist – If state decides to make a change and we haven't put it in charter, are we bound by it?

Attorney Marino – If this is adopted and the state changes how governments are run, we should be able to stay the same, unless the state specifically overrides charter.

Steve Thornquist – But we are making changes with this charter.

Attorney Marino – The changes were recommended by the Charter Commission.

Betsy Thornquist – There are 5 members of Charter Commission, 3 Republicans and 2 Democrats. The majority voted for each section of the charter, but not all votes were unanimous.

Sharon Huxley – As a member of the Board of Finance I want to address some sections concerning that board. Support maintaining the 6-year term. There is an incredible learning curve and 2 chosen at each town election preserves institutional memory. Charter Commission was given detailed written comments, but 9 of 15 recommendations were not considered. There are still unclear descriptions of town staff and administrators. Charter language micromanages Board of Finance functions. Any changes should have been by ordinance vs. in the charter. Draft should be abandoned, and charter commission released. If not, the Board of Finance comments should be addressed by the Selectmen.

Jamie Stirling – Recommend the Selectmen reject the charter. Thank you to the committee for its service. Committee should have been constructed differently. Take time to work on it further, don't rush.

Susan Bradford – The summary has comparison of current and proposed practices. Many items are not defined now. Charter is important to nail down how we do business. Public hearing provision for ordinance changes and budgets should match. Some definitions should be added for clarity.

Brad Buchta – The Democratic Town Committee voted unanimously to oppose draft charter. Some don't want it at all; others have specific concerns. Personal concern is one of process. It should have been bipartisan. You want to get the town behind it. Could have had an even number of Democrats and Republicans and odd number of Independents so never worry about a tie. Charter also dilutes the power of the First Selectman. Given feedback from Board of Finance, we ought to leave 6-year terms. Meetings should be required to be live streamed.

Connie Royster – Agree with Sharon's presentation. Board of Finance recommendations should have been addressed. Conflict of interest and ethics need to be in charter. Town has run without a charter for decades. We can change a lot by ordinance if needed.

Katie Erickson – Board of Finance worked hard to consider the draft charter. Power is transferred to the Board of Selectmen from First Selectman. In Section 7, Administrative Officials should be defined. Town Attorney should not be an official. Change from 20 to 50 people needed to call a town meeting should be reversed. Board of Education should be consulted regarding 6-year terms. Emergency needs to be defined. Notice of meetings must be required to be on town website.

Kris Sullivan – Chair of Wetlands and Cemetery Commissions. We always need more members, so don't think we should restrict who can join. As written, independents seem to be left out of board appointments. Land Use boards may need consulting engineer, not just Town Engineer. Many specific changes to Board of Finance. Charter won't protect the towns from state mandates. Encourage charter not to be adopted. Every meeting in Woodbridge is available to watch in real time and recorded.

Katie Erickson – Ethics component would be a good idea.

Wendy Chadbourne – What did the Republican members on the Charter Commission want that they didn't get?

Carol Goldberg – Nothing.

Hearing was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



William L. Brinton  
Town Clerk & Acting Secretary