Watertown Town Council

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617-972-6470

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Mark S. Sideris, Council President

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., Vice President & District C Councilor

Caroline Bays Councilor At Large

Anthony J. Donato, Councilor At Large

John G. Gannon, Councilor At Large

Anthony Palomba, Councilor At Large

Angeline B. Kounelis, District A Councilor

Lisa J. Feltner, District B Councilor

Kenneth M. Woodland, District D Councilor

MINUTES

MEETING OF THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2020 AT 6:00 PM
MEETING WAS LIMITED TO
REMOTE PUBLIC ACCESS ONLY

Pursuant to Article 8, Section 8-1(b) of the Watertown Home Rule Charter, and pursuant to the Call of the Town Council President, I hereby called a Meeting of the Charter Review Committee, consisting of the Town Council as a whole and six additional voters appointed by the Council President, said meeting was held on Tuesday, November 17, 2020 at 6:00 PM. in accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, §20, relating to the 2020 COVID-19 emergency and to avoid group congregation, this meeting had only remote opportunities for participation with public access provided as follows:

ACCESS INFORMATION:

A. The meeting was televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television): https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/#/watertown/video/5f490e6f9e1d640008a803ae?page=HOME&type=live
B. Public was permitted to join the virtual meeting online: https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/96419264286
C. Public was permitted to join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 964 1926 4286#
D. Public was permitted to comment through email: vpiccirilli@watertown-ma.gov

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The purpose of this meeting was to discuss, consider, and act on the following:

1. Call to Order
Council President Sideris called to order a regular meeting of the Charter Review Committee at 6:00 p.m. Those present were Councilors Caroline Bays, Anthony J. Donato, Lisa J. Feltner, John G. Gannon, Angeline B. Kounelis, Anthony Palomba, Vice President Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., Kenneth M. Woodland, Council President Mark S. Sideris, Marcia Ciro, Anne Fitzpatrick, Jon Hecht, Leo Martin, James Mello, and William Oates. Also present were Christopher McClure, Chief ITO, and Michael Ward, Director of the Collins Center.

2. Overview of Charter Review Website Presence
Council President Sideris introduced Christopher McClure, the Town's new Chief Information Officer, to provide a brief overview of IT's role in Charter Review. Mr. McClure stated the role of IT is that Technology is a partner in Principles and Strategies and Resources. Some suggested changes are mobile application alerts; the future hiring of a social media and web coordinator; and the formation of a partnership with Soofa to push information to the public. Another option is developing a Civic Engage Site on Civic Plus, which allows the Town to develop an unlimited number of microsites dedicated to a specific item. A question and answer forum can be established as well as an FAQ section. Flash votes can be used to create polling analysis providing a sense of the pulse of the community. A marketing strategy can be used with digital signs and doing programming on cable as well as tying into traditional news methods. He mentioned that e-code could be used to display the charter and Town laws and ordinances in a more user-friendly fashion.

Mr. McClure stated the site is trying to broaden accessibility to more of the population and to integrate with social media. In the conversation following, Mr. McClure was urged to allow for more inclusion of those needing ADA support, to provide access to translations, and to determine ways to display meeting participants.

3. Discussion of Draft Timeline
Mr. Ward presented a suggested timeline for the Committee's work. He broke the tasks down to four: Education – The Committee reaching out to the public; the Committee collecting information from the public; editing and providing a draft with the potential changes; and the voting.

Many members spoke about extending the data collection period. Council President Sideris stated that this timeline would be flexible. Others spoke to the development of processes for making changes to the Charter.

Tiffany York – Emphasized outreach is important because it is knowledge transfer and public awareness.

Council President Sideris reviewed questions from the public
- The future looks exciting on the digital front
- In documents previously provided, there are questions presented by the Collins Center; who will answer them? Mr. Ward stated that the Center could answer the more technical dimension but other parts will need to be answered by the Committee
- Whose responsibility is it to educate the public about the changes? Council President Sideris stated that this is the responsibility of the Committee
- When will the minutes be available? This should be available shortly.
- There should be sufficient time to air concerns and proper notice is needed to allow for reflection
- Outreach should be extensive to gather information
- How have other Towns handled initial public outreach to explain what can be changed with Charter Review? Mr. Ward stated that surveys could be used; however, the responses need a good sampling as well as representation; otherwise there is potential for the survey to be skewed. Texts are often better because they are more qualitative.

The Committee expanded on the outreach comments:
- Engagement - Information needs to be brought to the home with mailings and literature drops, meetings; the more the better
- There is a local group that had a meeting with more than 200 people to provide basic information about charter review; perhaps the Committee would join with them to provide basic information and obtain feedback
- There are 23 attendees at this meeting which is much larger than it was at the last review; this needs to be built on

Tiffany York – Transparency is important and stated the Timeline could be further developed to list who is responsible for certain tasks and what those tasks and decision points are.

4. Discussion with School Committee Chair
John Portz, Chair of the School Committee, stated that the School Department is not affected greatly by the charter as the Charter indicates that actions are completed in

accordance with State Law, which makes it easy to incorporate State Law changes into the Charter.

Mr. Portz stated that the manner in which the Town conducts meetings in the future after Zoom may need to be reconsidered. He cited a School Department meeting via Zoom with 500 people attending, noting that the Town Hall could not accommodate such a large audience. The meeting process may need to be rethought to accommodate a wider audience.

He asked why an increase in School Committee salaries needed Town Council approval as it was not cited in the Charter. It was stated that it is an appropriation and Town Ordinances require the Town Council to approve appropriations. Council President Sideris stated that perhaps this needs clarifying language.

Mr. Portz stated that the staggered terms for members worked fine and thought it worked well. He mentioned having the Council President as a member of the School Committee creates a link between governmental entities, but it is a large time commitment for the Council President. To be Council President needs someone with a flexible job. Council President Sideris stated that the point should be considered as to whether it excludes people from participating or seeking the position.

The Committee raised the issue of considering the provision of proper compensation. With a $7,500 annual stipend, this means a Councilor works 12 hours per week for $12 an hour and the low compensation could exclude people from participating in government. Another concern raised was whether the School Committee should have district membership similar to the Town Council. It was noted that Somerville uses that type of structure and that it could be reviewed.

When asked if the School Committee should be expanded, Mr. Portz said the current structure works fine. He mentioned that five members is too small and that nine members should be the ceiling; more than nine would be cumbersome.

5. <u>Discussion with Library Trustees Chair</u>
Leanne Hammonds, Chair of the Board of Trustees, stated, that like the School Committee, the Library Trustees' part in the Charter is minimal and the Charter works fine for them. The Trustees have four year staggered terms that provides for continuity. When a vacancy occurs and an appointment is made, the Council President is part of the selection sessions. She stated that perhaps another Town Council member could be assigned to this task or the selection could be left to the Board of Trustees. The Board believes that the Board should remain an elected one rather than appointed because it reflects the community. Among the duties of the Board is the appointment and evaluation of the Library Director. Appointment would diminish the role of the elected Board: To be an advocate for the people.

When asked why the Board should remain elected, Ms. Hammonds stated that like the School Committee, the Library has an educational component that is only increasing over the years and that it is board that acts as the public voice. She stated that other boards, such as the Zoning or Planning Board, requires expertise in the subject matter and therefore those board should be appointed. Mr. Koukoris, another Library Trustee, stated there is value in being elected; it makes the candidate more aware of community needs.

Ms. Hammonds stated that the Library does not receive many constituent calls in part due to the leadership of the Library and the ability to stay current with the programs offered.

In the question and answer portion, the following was mentioned:

- People miss the programs for the children
- Appointments may leave out new people who have much to contribute as opposed to election
- Could the Collins Center provide information for comparable communities regarding the School Committee? Council President Sideris stated that could be requested.
- Is the Charter Review Committee diverse enough? The representation appears to lack sufficient diversity in age and cultural backgrounds

6. Review and Discussion of Documents Provided by the Collins Center
Mr. Ward discussed the documents provided to the Committee. Several charters representing different types of governance were provided and should serve as a basis of understanding of governmental structures. Mr. Ward stated that several questions were submitted regarding the Charter; he stated his willingness to respond to them if that was the will of the Committee. Council President Sideris stated the questions should be responded to and requested that any further questions should be forwarded to the Council Clerk, who will collect them for forwarding to the Center.

Councilor Piccirilli read an email from Marilyn Devaney, Governor's Council, requesting that the meetings for December be canceled.

7. Next Meetings: December 1, December 15, and Possibly December 29, 2020
The Committee was decided it would meet on December 1 and 15, 2020, and if necessary, it would meet on December 29, 2020.

There was a discussion regarding the extension of the life of the Charter Review Committee. Council President Sideris stated that he would contact Attorney Reich as to the process for requesting that from the Town Council.

Council President Sideris stated that there would be a Communication Sub-Committee and asked all those interested to please respond quickly.

A request was made to provide data regarding the compensation for elected officials for comparable communities. Council President Sideris stated that the Personnel Director might do this. Later Mr. Ward agreed to provide such material.

A request was made for a current organization flow chart. Council President Sideris stated he would contact the Town Manager for the material.

8. Adjournment
Councilor Piccirilli moved to adjourn; Councilor Feltner seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Minutes were prepared by Marilyn W. Pronovost.