



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

Watertown Town Council

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

MINUTES

MEETING OF THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2021 AT 6:00 PM MEETING WILL BE 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 call 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, January 5, 2021 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

The purpose of this meeting is 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, Leo Martin, James Mello, and William Oates. Also present was Michael Ward, Director of the Collins Center. Jonathan Hecht was absent.
2. Approval of minutes of October 6, 2020
Minutes were prepared but some items were not included; therefore Council President Sideris suggested that they be tabled. Councilor Piccirilli moved to table the minutes of the October 6, 2020 charter Review Minutes; Councilor Woodland seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.
6. Communications Subcommittee Update
Council President Sideris asked that Item 6 be moved up in the meeting.

Ms. Ciro stated that the Communications Subcommittee met on Monday, January 4, 2021. Those present were Leo Martin, Councilor John Gannon, Anne Fitzpatrick and Elodia Thomas. The Subcommittee discussed updates that could be made to the Website including

the addition of links, service announcements for use on WCATV to list the meetings, fliers, sandwich boards, updates to social media sites and the electronic board at the Town Hall; investigated paid advertisements on the Watertown News website; began creating a poll for feedback; and designed a graphic for the Charter Review Committee. She asked that the graphic be accepted by the Committee as a reference.

Council President Sideris asked Ms. Ciro to provide a written report for the meetings, which Ms. Ciro did, and stated that the Charter Review Committee could authorize the use of the graphic. Councilor Piccirilli moved to authorize the use of the graphic as presented; Councilor Woodland seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.

She stated that the Committee is looking into setting up an interview to be coupled with a Public Forum on WCATV but that no date had been set.

3. Continue Discussion of Emerging Themes from Previous Memo (i.e., Vision, Legislative Capacity/Balance of Power Between Legislative and Executive, Transparency/Communications, and Responsiveness/Accountability)

Mr. Ward suggested that the Committee consider creating a preamble to the Charter as a statement of a vision of the community. He stated that a subcommittee could be established to create a brief statement laying out the purpose of the Charter; it could be a vision of the community and should be about a paragraph. He noted that the 2015 Comprehensive Plan vision could be used as a starting point. In the discussion, he clarified that a preamble is an objective statement with broad language as to why the draft is being done. It can become a mission statement. A request was made to include a diversity affirmation in the preamble.

4. Panel of Municipal Officials from Other Massachusetts Cities

Mr. Ward introduced the panel that would speak to the Committee, James Hellen, Town Administrator for the Town of Franklin; Kim Driscoll, Mayor of the City of Salem; and Scott Galvin, Mayor of the City of Woburn. He stated these officials represented communities that were comparable communities to Watertown.

Mr. Hellen stated that some of the benefits of a Town Council government are

- The public is aware of the checks and balances of their government and are exposed to both the elected and professional points of view of government operations; each side has an important role of government. Usually there is consensus on the operation except sometimes with zoning and planning. The Council acts as the “eyes and ears” of the community with a big picture vision of the municipality
- There is a culture of collaboration among all parts of government. To be successful all parts of the community must work together.
- The charter is simple, not complicated, and brief so that it is not overpowering for citizens who want to become aware of their community’s operation
- The Charter states the Town Administrator will act as the Town’s Ombudsman and allows him to be an advocate for the people where the Charter may not specifically address the matter.

Some of the deficits of Town Council Government is

- The need to attract good people to elected positions and that in some cases it may be better to appoint members to such operations as the Board of Health and the Board of Assessors. Often seats once won are not contested for years, such the Board of Assessors where there has been no turnover in twenty years
- Vacancies of elected positions are difficult to replace. It can be painful because the process is a holdover from the 60’s and 70’s. The process of filling unexpired terms is not well defined in the Franklin Charter
- There are a lot of inconsistencies with the terms of election – 2 year v. 4 year terms. There are no staggered terms and this can provide an inconsistency in operation

- The Ratification process. Some heads of Departments need to be ratified and the logic for it is uncertain; it may reflect a holdover from previous days.

Mr. Hellen then spoke to concerns regarding transparency by stating that this does not seem to be a big concern of the community and he has not received any requests for public records. Franklin has about 1,000 employees and lines of reporting are clearly defined which aids in the operation of the government. The Charter explicitly states that the legislative power lies with the Town Council. The budget is a statement that reflects the executive opinion, but the Charter makes the budget a collaborative effort between the Town Council and the Town Administrator.

Mayor Driscoll stated that a mayor being elected is driven to be accountable to retain the position and the mayor can drive the agenda of the community. If the relations with the City Council lack consensus, then partisanship can enter the operation. A mayor is required to be engaged with constituents because a mayor needs to make the populace aware of its accomplishments. If the form of government is a Town Council/Town Manager form of government, it is necessary to have a strong Town Manager because it is critical to success. Other concerns she raised were

- Having elected boards can cause dissension among different groups.
- Good daily governmental operations need to be done by professionals to be effective.
- Boards and town management cannot be in conflict to be effective; however, good management within the departments can be rewarded.
- There is a concern for complacency with employees who are retained for a long time with communication, transparency, and action on policy initiatives.
- It is easier to galvanize a community with a City form of government.
- Government is dependent on getting the right people; a Town Manager can professionalize governmental operation.
- In a mayoral form of government, the City can take on the personality of the mayor and this can reflect on the community.
- A Town Manager is more professional and as a result, the community is less subject to the influence of personality.

Mayor Galvin, who has been Woburn's Mayor for 11 years, stated their charter has been in effect since 1897 with some changes. He felt it was a true form of legislative/executive form of government. The Mayor is in charge of labor, contracts, personnel, and appointments. Some appointments were left to the City Council but he felt this should come under the umbrella of the Mayor. The Council's power lies with its control over appropriations and requires collaboration between the Mayor and the City Council. A mayor is accountable to the public and needs to stay close to his/her constituents. Decisions are often based on public opinion because the Mayor represents the populace.

In the panel discussion, the following matters were raised:

- A. Why is government trending toward appointed positions? Town Administrator Hellen noted that it provides for more accountability; many elected positions have seen no change in decades. Also election is a deterrent to qualified candidates who do not want to run but would be willing to maintain a position if appointed. As the municipal positions become more complex, it helps the community to have professionals. Also an appointee is more accountable and can be removed without another election.
- B. If a mayor cannot accomplish their financial goals for a community, how does a mayor provide for the fiscal health of a community? Mayor Driscoll stated that Salem has professionalized the administrative position and the city uses the GOFA budgetary standards. These have set the foundation of good government no matter who is in office.
- C. A comment was made about Woburn's website which connected people to a financial comparison of financial status. Mayor Galvin stated that continuity allows for good progress in a community along with qualified employees.

- D. How has your community increase public participation, obtain public opinion of non-participants, and interact with the public? Town Administrator Hellen stated he tries to be present; his cell phone and email are easily available; he feels the Town needs to make citizens feel their problem is solved or is being worked on; he attends events to get public input; and he attends office hours on Zoom. All of these allow him to learn what concerns people and to find new ideas.

Mayor Driscoll stated there is a need to separate information from engagement. Information is easy to provide; engagement requires involvement. In her city, there are many neighborhood associations that meet with her staff to consider group needs and there is a program that allows people to register their concerns. The city does not have a master plan but does have corridor plans. She felt it was necessary to tell people what their options are and what the impacts are.

Mayor Galvin stated it's important to be seen, to participate, to return calls, and to be accessible. He felt he could improve on his use of social media. He agreed with Mayor Driscoll that Zoom has increased participation because it makes it easier for the community to attend. As an official, it is necessary to listen when more people participate as there is a better view of community feeling.

- E. Do the mayors have a CEO administrator? Mayor Galvin stated he is the CEO who relies on strong Department Heads. Mayor Driscoll confirmed that she is the CEO but cities such as Framingham and Newton have administrators.
- F. How do you deal with Boards and positions that are elected or appointed? Town Administrator Hellen stated that he appoints the Zoning Board of Appeals positions and they are ratified by the Town Council. He mentioned that the Planning Board is elected and works fine because many members have been there a long time and understand the issues. The Boards of Health and Assessors tend to be more of an issue; there is a need to find qualified candidates for election.

- G. As mayors, what are the checks and balances that you face? Mayor Driscoll stated that as Mayor, she cannot spend any monies without the approval of the City Council. She stated that many expect the Mayor/City Council relationship to be contentious, but if that occurs, it only creates a lot of disharmony for the city. She stated the relationship needs to be a partnership as everyone has the goal of the betterment of the community. Also there are outside pressures such as bonding agency standards that require the city to maintain a professional posture and affects the proper maintenance of finances.

Mayor Galvin stated that it is important for the Mayor/City Council relationship to be collaborative because it can be a long term if it is contentious. He stated in Woburn, he has veto authority and has used it occasionally. It takes a two-thirds majority to overturn a veto.

- H. Is there any difference with Union negotiations? Mayor Driscoll stated that it is basically the same process. If the mayor has an opposing personality that can get in the way of the process. Mayor Galvin felt it was necessary to be present at all negotiations so that he is aware of the issues and bargaining items. Town Manager Hellen stated that he acts as a buffer between the unions and the elected officials and that this takes off some of the pressure on elected officials.
- I. What do you do for public outreach and how do you engage the community? Mayor Galvin stated they don't have anyone specifically for communication due to lack of funding. They have someone on retainer when needed but there is no active outreach. The website is used to provide as much information as possible including the budget, bond ratings, meetings, permits, hazardous mitigation plan with a requests for public input. Public outreach occurs when there are big issues such as the building of a new fire station.

Mayor Driscoll stated that she has no communication team, but her chief of staff does complete a lot of postings. The city uses social media outlets, a Code Red system for emergencies, new resident meet ups, meetings with local representatives and neighborhood associations. As mayor she produces a bi-weekly newsletter. There is a new Neighborhood Ambassadors program where people serve as conduits for what is happening in the neighborhoods. The City has equity policies and provides translations

mostly in Spanish.

Town Manager Hellen stated there is robust community engagement in his community. The Town hired a Marketing Director who works part time for both the Town and the Superintendent of Schools. The Town uses social media; has website translations; has a bi-weekly radio show. He feels that the Town should be the one source of information on government and that the Town needs to reach out to the media source of the people. He stated that he was surprised at the number of people listening to the Town's podcast.

- J. How are issues handled and how do they escalate so that they are addressed? What is his evaluation process and how are goals set? Town Manager Hellen stated that issue resolution begins with the Department Head because they are the experts in their respective field; if that is unsuccessful, then he gets involved. He stated it is important to hire the right people for the positions. Citizens have a comment period at the Town Council meeting. Department heads provide department presentations on a monthly basis

Goals are stated on a two year basis by the Council with an annual evaluation where the he and the Council review the status of the goals. There is a stipulation in his contract that he must be provided with the resources to be able to accomplish the stated goals.

- K. Addressed to Town Administrator Hellen: Are you a resident of Franklin? Town Administrator Hellen stated that he is not. The Town has that requirement but it can be waived. He felt that communities are getting away from the residency requirement as it may stifle getting the best candidate for the job. Also by living out of town, it avoids any appearances of conflict of interest.

Due to time constraints, the questions and answers were not addressed.

5. Update on Center Research in Response to Committee Requests
Mr. Ward stated that he had provided a memo regarding some of the research questions brought up in a previous meeting .

6. Communications Subcommittee Update
Please see the minutes for this item after Item 2.

7. Next Meeting Tuesday, January 19, 2021
The next meeting would be structured in a similar manner: a panel to discuss the legislative aspect of different forms of government.

A question was raised about the creation of a Preamble Subcommittee. Council President Sideris said an email would be sent out to the Committee.

A request was made for an expanded discussion on succession planning.

Tiffany Rose York - Asked if the speakers could be from communities that reflected being a suburban community. Mr. Ward stated that they try to pick communities with similar characteristics to Watertown; that Cambridge is unique and would not reflect Watertown; and both Cambridge and Somerville are about to enter into their own Charter reviews.

8. Adjournment
Councilor Piccirilli moved to adjourn; Mr. Mello seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Minutes were prepared by Marilyn W. Pronovost