

**CHARTER REVISION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING
May 12, 2023 at 9:30 am**

MINUTES

- 1. Call to Order** The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am.
- 2. Roll Call - Present: Catherine Graziano, Chair, Laura Rom, Vice Chair, Margaret Hogan, Lorna Persson, Jeffrey Allen (EO), Absent: Deb Carney Stephen Stolle (resigned), Evelyn Smith, Anne Mulholl**
Guest Speakers- Town Clerk Amy Weinreich and Tax Assessor Ken Swain

- 3. Discussion with Town Department Heads re: suggested Charter changes**
The Committee reviewed a memorandum from Clerk Amy Weinreich dated April 25, 2023 and a Memo from Tax Assessor, Ken Swain.

a) Budget Process: Article XXV and Article XXVI Financial Referendum (See Memo)

Amy Weinreich, Town Clerk provided the following /history/summary/analysis of the Budget Process. The last Financial Town Meeting (FTM) was in 2002. The Charter was revised to eliminate the FTM. In Dec./Jan. the Department Heads submit their budgets to the Budget Commission. The Budget Commission's deadline to submit to the Town Council is March 31. The Council is required to act by the second Monday in April, which permits a very narrow window for the TC's consideration. **Clerk Weinreich suggests that the Charter (C-79D) be amended to require the budget be submitted to the Town Council by March 15.**

b) Voting requirements (See Memo)

Clerk Weinreich also identifies ambiguities with what votes are allowed under differing quorum requirements. See C-93 B, C-94, C-95, and C-96 and recommends clarifications be undertaken.

Tax Assessor Ken Swain commented that the Budget Hearing (C-82) process often results in difficulty in securing a meeting quorum of just 10 voters. This year was no different. And, once the meeting commences, it is over quickly. This year, it concluded at 7:15 PM. He commented that this step seemed to be a holdover from the old FTM process.

The current Charter does not prohibit mail-in voting for the budget, but neither does it explicitly provide for it. During 2020, the Town did undertake mail voting for the budget, as well as in-person voting, resulting in the highest turnout ever. Since then, the mail-in ballots have been sent each year, but the cost is \$18,000 for 6,700 voters. The suggestion is to have voters request a mail-in ballot. Make it easy by having a visible button or link on Town website to request the mail in ballot.

c) C-100 Tax Levy(See Memo)

Clerk Weinreich submits that the current provisions are ambiguous and conflict with state statute R.I. Gen Laws 44-5-22. She suggested amendments as set forth in her memo. The committee suggested adding the words "or anytime prior to the issuance of the tax bills" at the end of the sentence under proposed C-100 (B).

d) Advertising Requirements (See Memo)

Clerk Weinreich suggested that there be a consistency through the charter to not specify print advertising and instead to use the language used in C-38 which states: " shall be published...in a manner as the council may prescribe by ordinance.

e) Dual Office Holding (See Memo)

Clerk Weinreich suggest that the Charter be revised to allow volunteers to serve on more than one Board or Commission since so many vacancies exist, despite being announced at every council meeting. The committee

also discussed the possibility of allowing employees to volunteer, assuming there are no prohibitions under the Ethic Laws. The position of Tree Warden was also questioned- is this required by state law? To be researched.

f) C103 (E) Purchasing - Master Price Agreement (See Memo)

Staff noted that using the MPA helps to get things done rapidly- but not necessarily deliver the best price. Ken Swain stated that this should not be used for professional services which should be selected through “lowest evaluated price.” “Items and services” should be for tradesmen & goods, not professional services. He further advised that the State MPA process has changed over the years and that Charlestown has been using neighboring states’ processes (MHQ?) for police vehicles. He stated that the goal is for department heads to have a clear and complete understanding of the purchasing process. He also stated that the dollar limits should in purchasing should be reviewed. He suggested that at some point the limit was raised and then lowered again. The bottomline was that a comprehensive review of Purchasing should be undertaken.

g) C-42 (A) Administrator Appointment & Qualification (See Memo)

Staff suggests that this section be re-written to permit, but not require that a search committee be appointed by the Council

h) C-42 Title (See Memo)

Staff suggests changing “Acting Administrator” to “Interim Administrator.” There seemed to be a consensus of committee members, although no vote was taken.

i) C-102- Purchasing (See Memo)

j) C-54 Department of Finance

Staff suggested that there be a Department of Purchasing be created in the Charter- particularly if the budget passes, since the budget has funding for a Finance Director. There was also a discussion on the Director’s position being management and therefore, not included in the professional staff bargaining unit.

4. Discussion and continued review of the Charter and any further additions/changes/revisions.

C-155- Department of Public Assistance

This does not exist, but the Town does have a small fund that assists residents in need. Committee members expressed some surprise at this. There was some discussion on whether it is required by law. This needs to be researched.

5. Discussion and potential action regarding establishing a subcommittee for the purpose of researching Charter Amendment history

No formal action taken on this agenda item.

6. Discussion and potential action regarding establishing cumulative list of Sections reviewed.

The Committee discussed the possibility of advancing proposed changes in “chunks” to the Town Council to get the conversation concerning changes out there earlier than if all changes were submitted to the Council at one time next year. No vote was taken.

The next meeting is on Tuesday June 13, 2023 at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers

Motion to adjourn by Laura Rom, seconded by Maggie Hogan. Motion passed unanimously 4-0.