

January 22, 2020 Charter Review Meeting Minutes

Present: Denis Kennedy, Ed Cameron, Councillor Charlie Tontar, School Committee member Bruce Menin, Councillor Sharif Zeid, Councillor Heather Shand, Sheila Taintor, Juliet Walker. Absent: Connie Preston.

Citizens in attendance: School Committee member Brian Callahan, Jeff Cutter, Jane Snow, Lynn Schow

Meeting called to order at 7:01 PM by Charlie Tontar.

Introductions.

Councillor Tontar reviewed relevant documents as to the process for this committee including Mass General Laws Chapter 43B, Section 10. The committee discussed understanding of Charter Commission, Special Acts, role of Council and Mayor.

Election of officers: After discussion of roles, on motion from Mr. Cameron, seconded by Councillor Shand, Councillor Tontar was nominated and voted as chair unanimously. After a motion from Mr. Cameron, seconded by Councillor Shand, Denis Kennedy was nominated and voted as vice chair unanimously. After a motion by Mr. Kennedy, seconded by Councillor Zeid, Ed Cameron was nominated and elected as secretary unanimously.

Meeting dates: After discussion, the following dates were agreed upon.

Wednesday, January 29 at 8 PM,

Wednesday, February 5 at 7 PM which will also be a Public Hearing with 30 minutes for the public, 30 minutes for Administration, 30 minutes for the Council, and 30 minutes for the schools.

Wednesday, February 12 at 8 PM,

Wednesday, February 26 at 7 PM also as a Public Hearing. If the agenda for February 5 is too crowded, this could be of a slot for the Schools.

Ms. Walker suggested having a public hearing on a Saturday, which was discussed without a decision.

Scope and charge for committee:

The chair will discuss the City Clerk's involvement with process. The chair believes that the committee gives a report to council and the council needs a 2/3 vote for approval and the Mayor's approval. The Council and Mayor could not make larger changes as to the composition of the legislative body, mode of election or appointment, or the terms of office. Those would require a charter commission or a special act and/or vote of the public.

Councillor Tontar said he thought that the charge was broad yet should focus on the smaller revisions that might be needed given the short timeframe with a submission to the City Council not later than May 1 for Council action by June 15.

Mr. Cameron suggested that the scope for the committee should be broad, yet focusing on the necessary amendment revisions, but also researching possible changes to form of government such as City Manager which would need to be taken up in a future process.

Mr. Kennedy suggested sticking to the smaller Items and correcting and tweaking the current charter. Mr. Kennedy stated that we have only been with this revised charter for a few years and over time more significant changes might be deemed necessary.

Counselor Zeid echoed the broad perspective regardless of process.

Ms. Walker wants to take a broader view.

Ms. Taintor mentioned Rank Choice voting as another possible big change.

Agreement by the committee that the focus will be on the “tweaks” and open to broader changes. The possibility of a sub-committee to look at broader changes was discussed without a decision at this time.

There was a discussion that the committee needed clarity on what the committee does at the May 1 deadline.

Councillor Zeid asked for clarity on process including getting city solicitor. Councillor Tontar said he had had discussions with the city solicitor and it was not made clear how to read the conflicting elements of Chapter 43B and how they reconciled with our current charter in terms of making changes.

On a motion from Mr. Cameron, seconded by Councillor Zeid, the committee agreed to invite to the January 29 meeting Lauren Goldberg from KP Law And Clerk Rich Jones to learn the process. All voted in favor.

The committee agreed that the goal would be to have a draft by mid-April. And that press notices would go out before each meeting. Chair will talk to local cable about videotaping.

Some of the content of the current charter that should be considered for revision would be Emergency Preamble, definition of ‘measure’, timing of charter review.

Discussion of public comment before or after committee meetings: Mr. Callahan stated that he thinks it appropriate to have a response from committee members when comment was made. Jane Snow said that she prefers to speak at end of meeting to

react to what was discussed and would like relevant handouts given to the public. Lynn Schow suggested two public comment sections with the first time-limited.

On a motion by Ms. Walker, seconded by Mr. Cameron, the committee agreed that there would be public comment at the beginning and end with the time constraints set by Chair and that Chair at his discretion may allow dialogue between public and members.

On a motion by a Councillor Shand, with a second by Ms. Taintor, the meeting was adjourned at 9:38 PM.

Minutes submitted by Clerk Cameron who will not be at the January 29 meeting because of a prior obligation.