

**Charter Review Committee  
Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2019, 6:30 p.m.  
City Hall Hearing Room 18  
210 Main St., Northampton, MA 01060**

**Meeting Minutes**

Present: Stan Moulton (ward 1), Robbie Sullivan (ward 2), Sam Hopper (ward 4), Bob Boulrice (ward 5), Mollie Fox (ward 7, arrived at 6:48 p.m.), Lyn Simmons, Chief of Staff (Executive Branch), City Councilor Bill Dwight (Legislative Branch), Attorney Alan Seewald, City Solicitor (non-voting member)

Absent: Dylan Gaffney (ward 3), Patty Healey (ward 6)

The meeting opened at 6:33 p.m.

Chair Moulton took the opportunity to congratulate Lyn Simmons on her new role as Longmeadow's Town Manager. Lyn Simmons will remain on the Charter Review Committee until it dissolves at the end of the year.

**1) Approval of minutes for Oct. 1, 2019, meeting**

**Councilor Dwight moved approval of the October 1, 2019, meeting minutes. Sam Hopper seconded. The motion to approve the minutes as written passed unanimously 6-0.**

**2) Public comment**

Rose Bookbinder, co-director of the Pioneer Valley Workers Center was present to speak. She stated that most of the members of the Workers Center feel invisible in the community and while they work in restaurants and farms, they are everyone's neighbors and their kids go to school with everyone else's kids, but their voices aren't part of the conversation. Ms. Bookbinder urged the committee to think about ways that Northampton can be out in front of doing things to protect these community members and involve them in local government. Ms. Bookbinder reminded the committee members that their families came through Ellis Island and were given citizenship upon arrival and unfortunately the same privilege isn't awarded to people coming into the United States today which leaves these people left out of processes and voting. Ms. Bookbinder stated it would be very valuable for Worker Center members, who don't have full citizenship, to be able to vote in city elections and help make them feel like they are participating. She asked the committee to think about a recommendation that would allow non-citizens to vote in city elections.

Councilor Dwight informed Ms. Bookbinder that this topic was discussed and part of the concern was people would be opened up to federal intrusion because of the government's access to driver's license photos. Councilor Dwight asked if Ms. Bookbinder is aware of a work-around.

Rose Bookbinder stated that individuals already live in fear that ICE will come to their work or home so it's important to create avenues for these people to be part of the community and voting and driving is part of that. She furthered that even though there is a slight risk, the ability to drive and vote by far trumps the fear they feel. Ms. Bookbinder will think of possible work-arounds.

Andrea Schmid, co-director of the Pioneer Valley Workers Center, stated that the ACLU has been looking at what happens in other states and published an article that breaks down how the Work and Family Mobility Act is different in that it keeps information secure and safe. In Vermont, ICE had the ability to subpoena RMVs to get information and the ACLU published something that states that isn't possible anymore.

Rose Bookbinder pointed out being able to have a say in local government would be profound for these individuals. They feel dehumanized that they are left out of day to day practices. She furthered that the Workers Center is key in building power so people feel they have a voice and one of those key ways is through voting.

Jesus, a member of the Pioneer Valley Workers Center, was present and spoke Spanish through his translator, Andrea Schmid. Jesus wanted to add that he has Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and given the situation at the federal level with TPS about to be cancelled, he lives in deep fear all the time and asks the committee for its support to protect the immigrants in this community. He furthered that people like him are the main breadwinners for their families and if their TPS status is cancelled, their families would be lost. Jesus asked that the committee do whatever is in its reach and stated that passing voting rights would be a simple way to show support. He furthered that there is a lot of fear in the community when people don't feel they are supported by their municipality which leaves them feeling invisible which perpetuates more fear.

Mollie Fox arrived at 6:48 p.m.

Councilor Dwight asked what the conditions are that contribute to invisibility.

Jesus, through Andrea Schmid, stated that fear exists all the time and is pervasive because people don't see him as an equal or a human or someone who isn't the same.

Councilor Dwight asked whether that means he feels alienation.

Jesus, through Andrea Schmid, stated there is a climate of fear by the president that has unleashed racism which is now happening in this community and impacts him and all the other immigrants. It has allowed employers to take advantage of workers by exploiting them and providing terrible working conditions.

Lyn Simmons previously spoke with the mayor about this topic being a potential item to address with the committee. Initial research was done but there was a concern for the safety risk for individuals if they were able to vote in municipal elections because of what could be done with their information.

Councilor Dwight suggested making this topic an agenda item for the next meeting for a broader

discussion and possible inclusion in the report.

### **3) Updates from committee members**

Chair Moulton informed the committee that it is on the agenda for the December 5 City Council meeting to make a presentation to the city council.

### **4) Discuss and vote on letter to the mayor regarding access to information (see Attachment1)**

Lyn Simmons reported to the committee that she researched why the annual reports stopped being printed after 1989. She pulled the city council records for 1988 and 1989 and in the budget for 1988, there was a printing committee with a budget of \$13,000 and in 1989 the printing committee requested \$16,000 and the city council struck that budget in half. She reported that she hasn't found the minutes that explain why it was cut in half but from that year on, the annual report wasn't funded. She pointed out that it wasn't the mayor that cancelled the reports, it was the city council that struck the budget of the printing committee which created the report.

Attorney Seewald pointed out that towns are required to file annual reports but cities are not.

Bob Boulrice drafted the letter to the mayor and stated that he looks at the letter as more of a template for conversation points if the mayor wishes to discuss them with the committee.

Councilor Dwight spoke with City Council Vice President Sciarra to the last point of the letter, "Know your City" workshops. He stated that a few years ago "City School" was offered, which was similar to the police academy and provided a breakdown and deeper analysis to citizens with the hopes to have better-understanding councilors and citizens. He mentioned there have been talks about reinstating that and it is on the radar.

Lyn Simmons spoke to the second point in the letter and pointed out that the website has an entire webpage dedicated to fiscal transparency. She wonders whether the webpage should be more specific and/or whether it should be formatted differently. She pointed out specific changes are helpful in order to know what changes to make.

Bob Boulrice stated that the website could be linked differently and he mentioned that he wasn't able to navigate "open checkbook" very well. He believes the financial information should all be in one place, displayed better and easier to access. He pointed out that he tried to include in the letter that a lot of the information is already on the website.

Sam Hopper suggested adding more context to the fiscal transparency page which could include an explanation of each item and what can be found within it.

Bob Boulrice noted that an "Information Nexus" should essentially be the website as a place to go get answers. He believes there should be something on the home page that would direct people with questions to a place where they can find the answers which should include school data, crime stats, etc. All the information in one place would be helpful.

Councilor Dwight suggested a possible button for vital statistics which could include links to crime statistics, fire responses, etc., which could provide one less click for people. He believes that part of the frustration is that people don't know how to find the information and that vital statistics or municipal data would be a good place for people to start their research.

Chair Moulton asked if it would be better to mark the home page more clearly.

There was a brief discussion about the city's current website and whether or not certain buttons or headers could be added, changed or reformatted.

Attorney Seewald reminded the committee that they are discussing making changes for two individuals that brought this issue forward.

Robbie Sullivan questioned the need of including the paragraph, "One resident encouraged the city to resume publication of a version of the traditional annual report previously issued and available in the library. This resident desires that "annual report" to easily find data or program performance metrics by the various departments." She suggested paring down the letter into a recommendation to look at how information is presented on the website rather than talk about two individuals who feel they aren't receiving information.

Councilor Dwight agreed with Robbie Sullivan that those sentences should be deleted from the letter.

Robbie Sullivan further questioned the need for and whether the issue is worthy of a separate letter. She believes it should be included in the final report but doesn't merit its own letter.

Chair Moulton pointed out that the committee felt it deserves to be separate because whoever the mayor is will determine what content should be included in the budget document. He stated that he wanted to bring it to the attention of the mayor because he is responsible for shaping the budget document.

Lyn Simmons pointed out that the budget is not a widely read document and the mayor can spend a lot of time adding information but the reality is people don't read it. She furthered that she is hesitant to add more work to department heads and the finance director when most of the information is already available online. Each year the mayor holds budget meetings and sometimes no one shows up and the largest turnout was five people, with the exception of last year because of the teacher contracts. She concluded by saying two residents are not a good representation of what the community as a whole wants in the budget document.

Councilor Dwight pointed out that the letter fleshes out what the committee feels is important and in the end everyone agrees information is difficult to find, so whatever can be done to facilitate that is a good thing.

Attorney Seewald reminded the committee of the public records request route in which a lot of time people who submit public records requests are directed to the website to find the information they are seeking. He agrees the website can be improved but it doesn't make sense that everything should be in

one place - just more accessible.

Chair Moulton and Bob Boulrice will work to rewrite the letter for reconsideration at the next meeting.

**5) Continued review of the committee's summary of recommendations with addition of topics for further study (see Attachment2)**

Attorney Seewald strongly encouraged the committee to not attach minutes to the final report otherwise each copy that is requested, the city clerk will need to include every set of minutes and all of the documents. The charter only envisions a summary and anyone can get the minutes online or from the city clerk if they wish.

There was a brief discussion on formatting the final report and whether or not the minutes should be affixed to the report. Chair Moulton will amend the report to say that minutes can be found in the City Clerk's office and online. The report will include the Google Doc.

Sam Hopper pointed out that the executive summary doesn't include all of the votes taken relative to Smith Vocational.

Councilor Dwight pointed out it is important to include all of the Smith Vocational recommendations because of the misinterpretation that Smith Vocational is a separate stand-alone entity as was represented by one Smith Vocational Trustee. He furthered that he would like the report to reflect that they are a school district under the City of Northampton.

Chair Moulton verified that including Smith Vocational under section 3-3 (appointments by the mayor) has been excluded from the summary, which will be corrected in the final report.

Councilor Dwight suggested a vote to change "Smith's Agricultural School" in the charter to be the complete and accepted title, "Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School" to avoid any future misunderstandings.

Attorney Seewald pointed out that according to the statute, Smith Vocational is actually accepted as, "Smith Agricultural School" and for the purposes of the charter it should be referred to as its founding name.

**Councilor Dwight moved to change "Smith's Agricultural School" in all occurrences in the charter to be listed as "Smith Agricultural School". Sam Hopper seconded. The motion passed unanimously 7-0 by roll call vote.**

Councilor Dwight suspects the committee will learn and identify more at the next meeting. He would also like the report to acknowledge that the charter review committee conducts a review every 10 years but that charter petitions can be made at any time. His concern is if the report states that certain topics warrant further study then some people might believe they won't be talked about for another 10 years.

Chair Moulton concurred and will list this information in the sixth paragraph of the report's

introduction.

Attorney Seewald suggested wording as such, "Even though the committee didn't make recommendations for including the following topics in the charter, it urges they be considered in future rounds of amendments."

#### **6) Discuss public forum at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 29 at Jackson Street School**

Chair Moulton informed the committee that all candidates on the municipal ballot have been invited to the forum including every elected official. Individuals from the Pioneer Valley Workers Center will attend the forum and offer translation services for compensation.

Lyn Simmons has coordinated the translation of the flyer for a \$90 fee and it will be sent to the schools to be sent home.

Chair Moulton stated that Patty Healey has offered to post the flyers, press releases have been sent and he and Sam Hopper will go on the Bob Flaherty show, WHMP, a week before the forum.

Councilor Dwight suggested posting flyers at restaurants, laundromats, the YMCA and grocery stores.

Lyn Simmons will send the flyer to Northampton Open Media (formerly NCTV) and to the radio stations.

Chair Moulton asked the committee to go to the mayor's office to pick up flyers if they'd like to post them.

Chair Moulton explained the format of the forum which will include brief highlights of the work the committee has done and then open up the floor for public comment. He pointed out there will be other agenda items to deal with that night as well.

Councilor Dwight made note that it is important to describe what the charter is at the beginning of the forum.

The October 29 meeting will replace the first meeting in November and the meeting after that will be November 19 in the hearing room.

#### **7) Adjourn**

**Councilor Dwight moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m. Sam Hopper seconded. The motion to adjourn passed unanimously 7-0.**