

Charter Review Committee

Thursday, February 7, 2019
6:00pm

City Hall Hearing Room 18
210 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

Minutes of Meeting

Attendees: Stan Moulton (ward 1), Robbie Sullivan (ward 2), Dylan Gaffney (ward 3), Sam Hopper (ward 4), Bob Boulrice (ward 5), Patty Healy (ward 6), Mollie Fox (ward 7), City Councilor Bill Dwight (Legislative Branch), Lyn Simmons, Chief of Staff (Executive Branch), Attorney Alan Seewald, City Solicitor

The meeting opened at 6:01pm

- **City Solicitor on background of city charter and scope of committee work**

Attorney Seewald introduced himself and explained his role was to provide oversight to the committee. The committee's role is to review the charter and make a recommendation to the City Council on what is best for the charter. The city's current charter has been in place for 7 years (entering the 7th year now).

The work of the committee will include conversations on little things that may need adjustment and larger conversations on items such as elections, and an elected vs. appointed city clerk.

The charter is the constitution of the city and defines the structure of government. Attorney Seewald gave a brief history on charters and the different types. The City of Northampton has a special act charter. A special act charter means the Legislature can't act unless a city or town asks for a municipality to act. Northampton has a strong Mayor form of government in the separation of powers. The Mayor is responsible for oversight of departments and the laying out of administrative functions.

The City Council has the most significant authority around the budget, it can reduce the budget but not increase it.

When reviewing the charter and deciding how to address it – it was discussed that it may be helpful to break it down into sections and have public forums on specific areas and invite specific audiences, i.e. a public forum on elections, a night for city officials, etc...

Once the report is done it will be filed with the City Clerk, the Mayor and the City Council. The City Council will decide whether to bring it forward. The Mayor would have to bring forward an order for a special act to amend the charter. The Legislature will make a determination on whether the change needs to go on a ballot or not.

Councilor Dwight stated that he plans to update the City Council at each meeting on the efforts of the Charter Review Committee.

Lyn Simmons stated that after working with this charter for 6+ years some small items have been identified as needing amendment.

Councilor Dwight stated that the City Council has identified some items as well.

Attorney Seewald gave the example of the City Council Rules, which are adopted every two years, the charter says they are in the form of an ordinance, however an ordinance can be vetoed by the Mayor, so the charter should really say the rules of the Council should be an Order.

Councilor Dwight offered that an item to be discussed could be lowering the voting age in municipal elections to 16 years.

Patty Healy said she has an idea relating to health care and the hospital that is not fully formed yet but will consider bringing it to the committee for discussion.

- **Introduction of members**

An introduction of members was done.

Ward 1	Stan Moulton
Ward 2	Roberta Sullivan
Ward 3	Dylan Gaffney
Ward 4	Sam Hopper
Ward 5	Robert Boulrice
Ward 6	Patricia Healy
Ward 7	Mollie Fox
Executive Branch	Lyn Simmons, Chief of Staff
Legislative Branch	Bill Dwight, City Councilor At-Large

- **Election of Officers**

Councilor Dwight stated that he would like a public member of the committee to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair and he intends to nominate two people.

There was a brief conversation on the role of the Chair and Vice-Chair. Agendas of the committee will need to be posted in compliance with open meeting law. The chair will set the

meeting agenda. The vice-chair would chair a meeting in the absence of the chair. If public comment will be offered at each meeting then a time limit should be set. Regarding email communication, never “reply all” on a message, it could be a violation of open meeting law. Items can be sent via email but members cannot communicate with each other. A quorum of this committee is 5 members.

Councilor Dwight stated that he would like to advance the nominations. He moved to nominate Stan Moulton as chair and Sam Hopper as vice-chair.

Both Stan Moulton and Sam Hopper spoke to their nomination and would be happy to accept.

Lyn Simmons seconded the nomination.

Patty Healy moved to close the nominations. Robbie Sullivan seconded. The vote to close nominations passed unanimously (9-0).

The vote to appoint Stan Moulton as Chair passed unanimously (9-0).

The vote to appointment Sam Hopper as Vice-Chair passed unanimously (9-0).

The committee members took the opportunity to offer a few words on their background and interest in the committee.

- **Set meeting schedule**

After review and discussion the committee set a meeting schedule of the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month, with the next meeting taking place on February 19 from 6:30pm – 8:30pm. If a member is unable to attend please communicate that to Chair Moulton. Attorney Seewald expressed that he will try to attend every meeting.

The committee agreed to continue meeting in the hearing room at City Hall and adjust to Council Chambers, or a larger meeting space if/as needed.

For the next meeting Stan and Sam will get together to discuss the agenda. The committee would like to see the list of items identified by the Mayor and City Council. Prior to the next meeting all members should read the charter, complete the conflict of interest training, and take the oath of office (if not already completed). Committee members should begin thinking of specific constituencies that should be contacted or considered for a public forum.

- **Adjourn**

Mollie Fox moved to adjourn at 7:10pm. Lyn Simmons seconded. The motion to adjourn passed unanimously (9-0).