

**Charter Review Committee Public Forum  
Tuesday, Oct. 29, 2019, 6:30 p.m.  
Jackson Street School gymnasium  
120 Jackson St., Northampton, MA 01060**

**Meeting Minutes**

Present: Stan Moulton (ward 1), Robbie Sullivan (ward 2), Dylan Gaffney (ward 3), Sam Hopper (ward 4), Bob Boulrice (ward 5), Patty Healey (ward 6), Mollie Fox (ward 7), Lyn Simmons, Chief of Staff (Executive Branch), City Councilor Bill Dwight (Legislative Branch), Attorney Alan Seewald, City Solicitor (non-voting member, arrived at 7:14 p.m.)

The meeting opened at 6:42 p.m.

**1) Approval of minutes for Oct. 15, 2019, meeting**

**Councilor Dwight moved approval of the October 15, 2019, meeting minutes. Sam Hopper seconded. The motion to approve the minutes as written passed unanimously 9-0.**

**2) Summary of committee's work followed by public comment**

Chair Moulton provided a brief overview of the committee's work over the past year. He stated the report will be done by the end of the year and submitted to the new city council in 2020 for its consideration of the recommendations. The final recommendations to move forward will be up to the city council, the mayor and ultimately the Legislature and the governor. Chair Moulton pointed out that there may be items that don't get a specific recommendation but they will be included as topics that should be studied further. Charter amendments can be proposed at any time and do not need to wait until the next formal charter review.

Sam Hopper briefly summarized the major recommendations that the committee will be including in its final report.

Marc Warner, a member of the 2012 charter review committee, was present to speak on the proposed initiatives. He stated that lowering the voting age and including language allowing non-citizens to vote will have to go to the Legislature and the governor and that these issues are under the purview of the state and are both issues that the state does not allow. Mr. Warner suggested that these measures are premature and should be listed as topics for further study.

Alex Jarrett, Ward 5 city council candidate, was present to speak to the committee's recommendations. Mr. Jarrett is in favor of ranked-choice voting because it is important to do whatever can be done to increase voter participation. He furthered that he is in favor of allowing residents who are part of a city to vote in their own city election whether documented or not. He stated that the United States has a broken immigration system so it makes sense to take local action. Mr. Jarrett pointed out that some

individuals feel that registering to vote would put certain individuals in danger but it is up to each individual to make their own decision. He stated that the Legislature may not have acted on these issues yet, but if there is a lot of support then things can start to shift. Mr. Jarrett pointed out that in other communities the city clerk is appointed by the city council, which creates the advantage of having nine individuals appoint and dilutes one person's undue influence. On the other hand, it can be complicated with having nine bosses. Mr. Jarrett would like to see more research in that regard. He concluded by saying he is in favor of "Know your City's Workshop" but would encourage holding these workshops at different times and places so that everyone can attend.

Diana Sierra, a Latin American History teacher at Smith College, stated that she was undocumented from 1994 to 2012 and only obtained citizenship two years ago. She stated that because of her experience being undocumented, she knows what it is like to live in a community that disenfranchises people and how decisions are made that directly impact other people's lives. Ms. Sierra told the committee that history will judge them based on the decisions that are made tonight. She furthered that the committee has the ability to push the limits of what is possible to expand immigrants' rights. Ms. Sierra told the committee that it can't play the role of white saviors and try to decide what is best for non-citizens. She furthered that non-citizens travel thousands of miles and are perfectly capable of making decisions that are right for them.

Laurie Loisel, a Ward 3 resident and member of the Human Rights Commission, stated that Northampton should do anything it can to make it easier for people to vote. She stated that this topic was discussed at the Human Rights Commission and was seen as a human rights issue and should be included as a recommendation for change to the city charter.

Gabriella Della Croce, a Northampton resident, stated it is important to allow people who live and work in our community and whose children go to the same schools, to have a voice in government. She stated it is hard to pass at the state level but it has to start at the city level. She urged the committee to include a recommendation allowing non-citizens the opportunity to vote in municipal elections.

Alondra was present to speak, through a translator, and asked the committee to analyze its decision. Alondra stated that the kids of Northampton represent the future and they should be given the chance, not as immigrants, but as people, to be able to vote. Alondra furthered that 1,000 heads put together is better than one and non-citizens are simply trying to live their best life.

Penny Geis, a Ward 7 City Council candidate and a Leeds resident, spoke to the importance of ranked-choice voting. She stated that there was a preliminary election a few weeks ago that was a waste of time and money which is an argument for ranked-choice voting. Ms. Geis would appreciate ranked-choice voting being included in the committee's recommendations.

Finley Janes, an elementary school educator in Northampton and 10-year resident, stated that citizens and non-citizens are all part of our community and non-citizens are friends, loved ones, neighbors, co-workers and colleagues and consistently show up for the community and contribute to the community, feed the community and fix the community and do all of this without representation. Finley Janes stated that the community should take an anti-racist stand to let everyone know that everyone in Northampton has a voice. Finley Janes responded to the first speaker, Mr. Warner, and said that there

is nothing more important than ensuring equality and letting everyone know that Northampton is anti-racist.

Rose Bookbinder, co-director of the Pioneer Valley Workers Center, stated she is excited about the recommendations and pointed out that it is important for Northampton to set an example because other towns look to Northampton for ideas of what can be done in their towns. Ms. Bookbinder stated that she is excited to support non-citizens being able to vote in municipal elections and vowed to stand with the committee to advocate for this initiative and to push it through the Legislature. She furthered that the Pioneer Valley Works Center is willing to take a risk with the committee to move it along.

Cecilia Prado, a research assistant at Amherst College, stated she has lived in Northampton for eight years. Ms. Prado has been an active member of the community and she cares, along with her fellow immigrants, about the city except they aren't allowed to choose their public servants. She stated it is frustrating and is present to help send a message to the state showing that all members of the community should be able to participate in the voting process.

Amy Bookbinder spoke in support of the recommendations to increase civic participation and for the proposal to extend voting rights to non-citizens. Ms. Bookbinder hopes that ranked-choice voting is recommended and approved. She encouraged the committee to recommend making it possible for undocumented residents to vote. She pointed out that there is a new campaign to support driver's licenses for everyone and local businesses are signing up in support. She concluded by saying whether or not the state approves of extending immigrant voting rights is not the point, but Northampton can be a model of what should happen.

Christina Ruggiero-Corliss, a Florence resident, spoke in favor of recommending that non-citizens be allowed to vote in municipal elections. She stated it is pretty simple in that people who live in Northampton should be able to take part in the decisions that affect them.

Wendy Parrish stated that she is in favor of ranked-choice voting.

Jose Manuel stated it is good to let undocumented individuals vote because their children are going to school and people are buying and renting property so they should have a right to vote. He concluded by saying that together we can make a difference.

Rachel Maiore, Ward 7 city council candidate and member of the Human Rights Commission, stated that civic engagement is critical for a healthy democracy. She urged the committee to consider affording the right to vote to non-citizens. She pointed out that constitutionally, states have the right to allow non-citizens the right to vote, and in 1926 immigrants voted in 40 states for federal elections but those rights were rescinded because of voter suppression and movements at the time. She continued by saying that allowing non-citizens the right to vote will be an investment and will be a powerful symbol saying that Northampton stands behind its citizens and everyone has a stake in the community. She stated that it will not only increase the tax base but will improve the local pool of talent, enrich schools and help the local economy. Ms. Maiore concluded by pointing out that San Francisco allowed non-citizens the right to vote for school board elections, and in doing so it has strengthened its outreach infrastructure to traditionally hard-to-reach groups, which in turn will help with the census to get a

more accurate count. With a more accurate count, San Francisco will get fairer federal funding and receive better political representation.

Lois Ahrens, a resident of Ward 1, stated that many people who live in Northampton and are not citizens work at colleges and hospitals and are cut out of voting and integrating this pool of people will encourage people to be other kinds of participants on committees, boards, etc. Ms. Ahrens concluded by saying she supports the initiative to allow non-citizens the right to vote in municipal elections.

Sarah Field, a resident of Ward 3, said she agrees with most of the comments previously made and supports of ranked-choice voting. She stated that the history of development of democracy has been about expanding voting. Ms. Field addressed Mr. Warner's comments and pointed out that receiving pushback from the state is not an adequate reason not to make a decision. She stated that people will not be allowed to vote if they don't ask for it and if that right is pushed for, then others may join in. She concluded by saying that expecting rejection is never a reason not to try for something.

Roni Gold, candidate for at-large school committee, spoke about running for an elected seat. Mr. Gold stated that the committee has talked about encouraging diversity among elected and city officials and this should also be something to consider. Mr. Gold stated it is his first time running and it is very challenging, not just because of the time and money spent, but because of access to information and how the system works. Mr. Gold stated that the charter, if it can, should neutralize campaigning and make available policies and procedures so that everyone has access to the same information. Mr. Gold believes lacking that access to information prohibits diversity and if there was a level playing field and if people didn't think that they were going up against candidates that had more information, then it would encourage more diversity.

Karen Foster, Ward 2 city council candidate, told the committee that she is excited by the opportunities to increase participation in municipal government. Ms. Foster stated that by starting with a small step and joining a board or commission will open the process for more people to get involved. She concluded by encouraging the committee to be as inclusive as possible to help the city move forward.

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

There were no updates from committee members.

### **4) Discuss and vote on possible recommendation to extend voting rights in municipal elections to non-citizens**

Councilor Dwight moved to put the topic on the floor for purposes of discussion. Sam Hopper seconded.

Patty Healey stated that she is in favor of extending the right to vote in municipal elections to non-citizens and that the Constitution doesn't say they can't vote. She furthered that she wants everyone in the community to be able to participate and vote because they should have a voice. She pointed out that some communities in Maryland allow non-citizens to vote and those communities are better off for it and it seems like a logical step to correct injustice. She pointed out that the committee has spent months talking about how to reach underrepresented communities and while there are complications

with the Legislature, the time has come to correct the injustices that are seen every day.

Councilor Dwight spoke to address the comments made by Mr. Warner. Councilor Dwight stated that the charter recommendations are not an all or nothing proposition. The Legislature can pick and choose from the recommendations but it will not get rejected outright because of one or two recommendations so not asking for something is worse than getting rejected. He furthered that anyone who wants to vote and asks for that right should be able to vote. He stated that individuals who turn 18 are suddenly allowed to vote and they didn't take a test or do anything besides turning 18. Being able to vote is a right, not a privilege, and asking for voting rights for non-citizens conforms with everything the committee has already discussed.

Sam Hopper agreed with what has been said by Councilor Dwight and Patty Healey and would like to also address Mr. Warner's comments. She stated that she works for a state legislator and has looked into the process for changing a charter. She stated there is not one way to do it and expecting rejection is not a reason not to put something forward. She concluded by saying that having conversations like these, whether or not they result in approval, are important.

Robbie Sullivan agreed with the sentiments of Councilor Dwight and Sam Hopper and noted one additional point that struck her which was that the committee cannot play the role of white saviors. She appreciated hearing that the committee's job is not to play that role and allow people to make their own risk assessment. She also agreed with Patty Healey as far as history goes and that Northampton needs to keep pushing the envelope and being a leader. She concluded by saying that making these recommendations is all about pushing the limits because it has to start somewhere and she would like it to start here.

Bob Boulrice noted that 30% turnout among voters is considered to be a groundswell so anything that can be done to increase participation should be done. He stated that Voter Choice Mass is in the process of gathering 60,000 petition signatures to present to the Legislature. He concluded by saying that the time has come to afford non-citizens and 16-year-olds the right to vote because whatever can be done to push voting rights forward should be done.

**Councilor Dwight moved to recommend extending voting rights to all non-citizens of qualifying age in municipal elections. Sam Hopper seconded.**

Chair Moulton stated this is an important vote and Northampton has been on the cutting edge in terms of leadership issues, equity, inclusiveness and access. This is another way that Northampton can encourage and give power to all community members who live and work in Northampton. He concluded by saying this is a way for a local community to send a powerful message at a time when there are divisive and hateful policies at the federal level.

**The motion to recommend extending voting rights to all non-citizens of qualifying age in municipal elections was approved 9-0 by roll call vote.**

- 5) Further discussion and vote on letter to the mayor regarding access to information (see Attachment1)**

**Councilor Dwight moved approval of the revised iteration of the letter to be sent to Mayor Narkewicz. Mollie Fox seconded. The motion to approve passed 8-0-1 with Lyn Simmons abstaining.**

- 6) **Discussion and vote on request by City Council President Ryan O'Donnell to include in the charter the prohibition on privatizing municipal water resources and infrastructure that was adopted by ordinance in 2016. The ordinance (325-1) reads: *The public water resources and infrastructure of the City of Northampton, including systems and facilities related to the supply, storage, treatment and distribution of water, shall be owned or leased by the City of Northampton and controlled by the City of Northampton. Such resources and infrastructure shall not be sold, leased or transferred into private ownership or control.***

**Councilor Dwight moved this item to the floor for discussion. Sam Hopper seconded.**

Councilor Dwight stated this ordinance was approved unanimously by the city council and it was introduced out of the concern that municipalities could transfer their water supply to private companies so the city wouldn't have to be burdened with it. Councilor Dwight stated that municipalities don't have many resources but water is one of them and worth protecting, particularly from private interests. Councilor Dwight stated that Councilor O'Donnell shared with him that this item reaches the magnitude for inclusion in the charter because without water, we would be dead.

Bob Boulrice stated he would like to hear more on this topic and would like to hear from Councilor O'Donnell himself. He stated that this is already an ordinance and questioned the need to put it in the charter because there is technology and management involved and things could change down the road.

Councilor Dwight stated that this ordinance could be overturned by citizen's referendum so including it in the charter would make it much more difficult to overturn.

Patty Healey stated she would like to have Councilor O'Donnell address the committee to talk about it. She stated she is in favor of including it in the charter because it's a global issue.

**Sam Hopper moved to table this discussion until the next meeting so that Councilor O'Donnell can address the committee. Councilor Dwight seconded. The motion to table the discussion passed unanimously 9-0.**

Chair Moulton said out he will invite Councilor O'Donnell to address the committee at its next meeting on November 19.

## **7) Adjourn**

**Sam Hopper moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m. Councilor Dwight seconded. The motion to adjourn passed unanimously 9-0.**