

Town Charter Revision Commission Meeting – Thursday, July 31, 2024

Public Comments

In-Person:

1. **Robert Berman, 8 Hiram Lane** suggested changing charter language for Council elections from 2-year to 4-year terms. He noted that there should be 10 members of Council, elect half of the elected body. The mayor would only vote if there were a tie breaker scenario. Mr. Berman expressed the importance of continuity and institutional knowledge with Council initiatives. In regard to Library Services (Section 604), he suggested that the Library Director report directly to the Town Manager, who is responsible for hiring and firing personnel, not the Library Board of Trustees.
2. **Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** commented on the budget referendum language referencing the threshold to obtain signatures for a referendum. He also referenced Council structure in conjunction with the Board of Education, need to be more accountable for the BOE budget, however the state law does not allow that. In addition, Mr. Gough noted the Commission should consider staggered terms for other elected boards and commissions.

Virtual:

1. **Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Lane,** commented on not having a proposed draft report to provide valuable input. She thanked the Commission for moving the meeting back to Council Chambers to provide hybrid access to those who are home bound or not able to attend in person.
2. **Wendy Williams** expressed her appreciation for the hybrid meeting access and the decorum within the Commission and their process. She noted that she would like to see the proposed revisions prior to the next scheduled meeting, Saturday, August 3, 2024. Ms. Williams commented on having staggered terms with the Council and the Mayor should be permitted to vote. Lastly, Ms. Williams stated that there was no change in Library Services.
3. **Rickford Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane** commented on the remaining Commission meeting schedule and noted the importance of providing a proposed draft for public inspection, review and comment.
4. **Dr. James Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road** thanked the Commission for relocating the meeting back to Council Chambers for open and full transparency for those individuals who are not able to attend in-person meetings. He also expressed his full support of the providing a proposed draft revision for review and comment. Dr. Biffer noted that there is no recall provision per state statute. Also, he is not in favor of providing any council compensation.

Chairman Suggs mentioned that Commissioners have decided to allow additional public comments after discussion of agenda items, beginning with this meeting and moving forward on future meeting agendas. Limiting additional responses to 2 minutes.

Public Comments – Part II

1. **Nick Caruso, 4 Holland View Drive** informed the Commission of the last budget referendum held in Town was in 1991. He also commented on staggered terms for the Town Council and encouraged the Commission to discuss further the suggestion to elect the Mayor separately.
2. **Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** expressed comments regarding length of terms and consider other town boards e.g. TPZ. He also noted that adding town departments should also have flexible language relative to reorganization by the Town Manager. The recommendation for referendum petition threshold is current at 15% participation level, review all referendums and maintain consistency throughout the charter.
3. **Bonnie Bercowetz, 492 Park Avenue** thanked the Commission for adding “public comments” at the end of the meeting after agenda items. She noted that it would be terrible to allow compensation for the Council. Mrs. Bercowetz reiterated the importance of volunteerism and community.

Virtual:

4. **Councilor Joseph Merritt** commented and made suggestions on the following items:
 - Strongly consider 2/3 political party, difficulty in finding minor rather than bare majority.
 - Council compensation – small amount, not a bad idea – agree with considering this has an option.
 - Mayor’s selection – let Council to make the decision
 - 15% electorate to participate
 - Town Manager residency -eliminate requirement
 - Library Services- status quo
5. **Dr. James Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road** commented on the pros and cons of Council compensation. He cautioned the commission with suggested charter language on the approving authority of a certain amount. He suggested a potential tax abatement or similar benefit.
6. **Gail Riley, 8 Maple Avenue** is not in support of providing Council compensation.

In-Person:

7. **Rickford Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane** noted that the current system works for the Election of Mayor. He also commented on having no Council compensation and those that volunteer their time and talent should just give back to the community.
8. **Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Lane,** commented on the Commission's consideration for Council compensation. If so, she recommended giving compensation to all elected officials and to not have council select their own value – in favor of offering a tax break, Election of Mayor – clear definition.