



## Charter Commission

Administration Building  
149 Main Street  
Watertown, MA 02472  
Phone: 617-972-6470

### MINUTES

#### CHARTER COMMISSION MEETING TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2010 @ 7:00 PM RICHARD E. MASTRANGELO CHAMBER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Commissioners:

Mark S. Sideris,  
Chair

Stephen P. Corbett  
Michael Donham  
John A. Donohue  
Dennis J. Duff  
Susan G. Falkoff  
Anthony Palomba  
Rhiana Kohl  
Angeline B. Kounelis  
Cecilia Lenk  
Pamela Piantedosi  
Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.  
John J. Lawn, Jr.  
David Siegel  
Athelia Tilson

1. ROLL CALL: A regular meeting of the Charter Commission was called to order at 7:00 pm, in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber, Administration Building. Present for the meeting were Commissioners Michael Donham, John A. Donohue, Dennis J. Duff, Susan G. Falkoff, Anthony Palomba, Rhiana Kohl, Angeline B. Kounelis, Cecilia Lenk, Pamela Piantedosi, Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., John J. Lawn, Jr., David Siegel and Chair President Mark S. Sideris. Commissioners Tilson and Corbett were absent.

2. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES: [September 7, 2010](#); [amendments](#). Commissioner Donham moved the minutes as amended, seconded by Commissioner Duff and adopted by unanimous voice vote with Commissioners Michael Donham, John A. Donohue, Dennis J. Duff, Susan G. Falkoff, Anthony Palomba, Rhiana Kohl, Angeline B. Kounelis, Cecilia Lenk, Pamela Piantedosi, Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., John J. Lawn, Jr., David Siegel and Chair President Mark S. Sideris voting in favor.

3. PUBLIC FORUM: On current form of government. The Chair stated that there was a Sense of the Council vote by the Commission to retain the current form of government. The Chair opened up the forum for public comment.

1. Clyde Younger, 188 Acton Street – asked that the Commission present a side-by-side comparison of the two forms of government; town council/manager versus mayor for the public.

The Chair stated that a full comparison/presentation was provided by Commissioner Siegel to the public in July. A DVD of the presentation is available to anyone who missed the presentation. The Chair indicated that he will request that Watertown Cable replay the presentation for their viewers.

Commissioner Siegel noted that the presentation is also posted on the town's website.

Burt Greenberg, Duff Street – stated that the current form of town government has led to the accomplishment of many good things including the town being in good financial condition while other towns have not fared so well.

Commissioner Falkoff moved to retain the current form of government, seconded by Commissioner Lenk.

The Chair recognized Commissioner Pamela Piantedosi who read a [statement](#) with respect to a written [invitation](#) extended to East Watertown Betterment Association members by Commissioner Kounelis.

She noted that it was her opinion that the dear friend letter projected the government as a subgroup of powerful and influential people with disregard for the public they serve. Commissioner Piantedosi stated that the letter omitted important facts including that the two authors of the minority report went on to serve under this government that they opined about. She asked how has the current form of government failed our community; how have the manager's appointments failed our community and indicated that though the commission lacked a unanimous vote for our current form of government thirty years ago, this form of government has proven its success from its lack of failures.

Councilor Kounelis stated that she took it upon herself as part of community service to notify residents of ongoing issues in hopes that they will participate. She noted that the participation has been minimal and that this is the only time that the Charter is to be reviewed and voice opinions on how you would like to see Watertown organized for the next several years. The turn out tonight is disappointing she stated.

Commissioner Falkoff indicated that perhaps the lack of participation from the public suggests a sense of satisfaction with the government as it is.

Commissioner Donham stated that from what he has heard from residents is that the dissatisfaction is not so much with the form of government but whether or not a particular department is doing its job – is the government performing well not whether the government itself is the problem. He indicated that he asks people how a new form of government will solve the problem that you have with streets, trees, and no one has been able to give him an answer.

Commissioner Piccirilli stated that Councilor Kounelis' letter raises important questions and points, which is what our job here requires us to do, to raise and answer such questions. He noted that no one has yet to say that having an elected mayor will raise the level of government from

what we currently have. He stated that if you look at accountability, transparency and balance of power issues you will find that there is more of that with the current form of government than with an elected mayor. Councilor Piccirilli stated that mayors create the budget and make policy decisions often in private and mindful of his/her group of supporters. The balance of power, he stated is with the town council/manager form of government; which has more checks and balances along with the power to fire the manager. To the contrary, a mayor sets policy, creates and administers the budget; it is a “winner-take-all” system.

With respect to the “inner circle” implying “advice”; Councilor Piccirilli stated that it is well known that people will act in their own self interest, as the individual profits, so does the system. He noted that with a professional manager, who has a boss (the council), it is in the manager’s self interest to keep his job and to do that the manager needs to do a good job managing the town and in meeting the guidelines set forth by the council. The inner circle, he stated, represents the majority of 5 councilors who will vote in open session. In contrast, an elected mayor answers to the majority of voters and supporters; because it takes money to run for office, undue influence of supporters create the inner circle along with the political allies where decisions are not happening in public session. He asked, what is more beneficial, 9 councilors providing advice in public or political allies providing advice in private? Councilor Piccirilli state that no form of government is perfect; the best we can do is create a system of maximizing positive effects and minimizing negative effects.

Councilor Kounelis stated that her correspondence accomplished what she set out to do, which was to create dialogue and participation. She stated that she is delighted that Commissioner Piantedosi brought this forward and critiqued her ever word; it means a lot. Councilor Kounelis stated that she would like to read the entire document. After its reading, Councilor Kounelis stated that her letter is not giving an opinion as there is nothing bias or selective in it.

Commissioner Palomba stated that he would like to voice his appreciation to Councilor Kounelis for reaching out to residents as that was one of the stated goals of the Commission early on; to reach out and speak to organizations regarding the review of the Charter. This is called the Charter Review Commission and sometimes he noted he feels that we are having discussions on the role of democracy. There are cities across the country that operate with a mayor – to place it in context that one is more democratic than the other is wrong he stated. Commissioner Palomba indicated that the Commission has struggled with trying to figure out the best way to review a document that is be boring and tedious and the Commission keeps going back to discussing the forms of government. He noted that he would like to move away from that discussion and talk about what we might want to change in the Charter.

Clyde Younger stated that Councilor Kounelis should be lauded for mailing this correspondence to the community in an outreach effort.

Pat Gold, Duff Street – applauded Councilor Kounelis for her efforts, she noted her own efforts in sending out letters to get people involved. Ms. Gold stated that the Charter was reviewed in 2001 with minor changes being voted which re-affirmed the Charter was working. Thirty years of the Charter working tells you something she noted.

Burt Greenberg, Duff Street – the Commission did not fail in its duty, the fact that people did not attend this meeting is a reflection of residents satisfied with the current form of government.

The Chair indicated that the Commission has already reached out in a number of way, Commissioners can continue to reach out on their own to groups or residents for future meetings.

Roy Dell William, former teacher – asked that an open forum take place at the high school with students and parents.

The Chair noted that going forward he would like to have a subset of this Commission take to the road and conducts informal meetings.

On the motion to retain the current form of government and upon a roll call vote, it was adopted 12-1 with Commissioners Michael Donham, John A. Donohue, Dennis J. Duff, Susan G. Falkoff, Anthony Palomba, Rhiana Kohl, Cecilia Lenk, Pamela Piantedosi, Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., John J. Lawn, Jr., David Siegel and Chair President Mark S. Sideris voting in favor and Commissioner Kounelis voting no.

Clyde Younger asked that the Commissioners have a Reconsideration vote as the Council does with its annual budget.

Commissioner Donohue moved to reconsider the vote to retain this form of government with the hopes that the motion fails, seconded by Commissioner Duff and defeated by unanimous roll call vote with Commissioners Michael Donham, John A. Donohue, Dennis J. Duff, Susan G. Falkoff, Anthony Palomba, Rhiana Kohl, Angeline B. Kounelis, Cecilia Lenk, Pamela Piantedosi, Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., John J. Lawn Jr., David Siegel and Chair Mark S. Sideris voting no.

#### 4. NEW BUSINESS

The Chair took up Article 6 and 8. The Chair asked that any proposed changes discussed tonight be forwarded to the Clerk at the end of the process for which a meeting will be held and all the proposed changes will be discussed in-depth.

There was a discussion on whether to continue with a ten year review of the Charter. The Chair recognized Cass Sabier, Arthur Terrace resident who spoke in support of retaining the current review process of every ten years with citizens serving on the Commission. There was discussion on whether or not to retain the five year review of Ordinances. The pros and cons were discussed and it was decided to propose a change to have the review of the codification of town Ordinance be done internally by the Town Clerk.

The Chair announced that the next meeting will take place on October 5<sup>th</sup> with continued discussion on outreach; a presentation by the Town Clerk and if time allows, continued discussion on Article 8. The Chair announced that the Commission will take up Article 2 on October 19<sup>th</sup>.

5. **ADJOURNMENT – 9:00 pm.** Commissioner Donohue moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Lenk and adopted by unanimous voice vote with Commissioners Michael Donham, John A. Donohue, Dennis J. Duff, Susan G. Falkoff, Anthony Palomba, Rhiana Kohl, Angeline B. Kounelis, Cecilia Lenk, Pamela Piantedosi, Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., John J. Lawn, Angeline Kounelis, David Siegel and Chair Mark S. Sideris voting in the affirmative.

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the Charter Commission where a quorum was present, the above minutes were adopted as amended on October 19, 2010.

Mark S. Sideris, Council President