



Watertown Town Council

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

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Mark S. Sideris,
Council President

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.,
Vice President &
District C Councilor

Caroline Bays
Councilor At Large

Anthony J. Donato,
Councilor At Large

John G. Gannon,
Councilor At Large

Anthony Palomba,
Councilor At Large

Angeline B. Kounelis,
District A Councilor

Lisa J. Feltner,
District B Councilor

Kenneth M. Woodland,
District D Councilor

MEETING OF THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2020 AT 6:00 PM MEETING WILL BE LIMITED TO REMOTE PUBLIC ACCESS ONLY

MINUTES

Pursuant to Article 8, Section 8-1(b) of the Watertown Home Rule Charter, and pursuant to the Call of the Town Council President, I hereby call a Meeting of the Charter Review Committee, consisting of the Town Council as a whole and six additional voters appointed by the Council President, said meeting was held on Tuesday, October 20, 2020 at 6:00 PM. in accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, §20, relating to the 2020 COVID-19 emergency and to avoid group congregation, this meeting has only remote opportunities for participation with public access provided as follows:

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. The meeting was televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television): <https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/#/watertown/video/5f490e6f9e1d640008a803ae?page=HOME&type=live>
- B. Public was permitted to join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/96419264286>
- C. Public was permitted to join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 964 1926 4286#
- D. Public was permitted to comment through email: vpiccirilli@watertown-ma.gov

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss, consider, and act on the following:

1. **Call to Order**
Council President Sideris called to order a regular meeting of the Charter Review Committee at 6:00 p.m. Those present were Councilors Caroline Bays, Anthony J. Donato, Lisa J. Feltner, John G. Gannon, Angeline B. Kounelis, Anthony Palomba, Vice President Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr., Kenneth M. Woodland, Council President Mark S. Sideris, Marcia Giro, Anne Fitzpatrick, Jon Hecht, Leo Martin, James Mello, and William Oates.
2. **Introduction of the Collins Center**
Michael Ward, the Director of the Collins Center and a Watertown resident, stated the Collins Center was created by the Commonwealth to assist local and state governments and agencies with various operational issues. Among the many issues the Center works on is Charter Reviews.

Mr. Ward stated the Committee should decide on what topics they want to consider. He suggested viewing the matter in the broadest manner by deciding on what systemic problems and issues the Committee would like to solve.
3. **Discussion on Current Issues/Concerns with Current Charter**
Members were asked to state their concerns. The following issues were addressed:
 - There are advantages and disadvantages to both the Town Management or the Mayoral system of government; the Committee should review the available options
 - The advantages to a Town Manager versus a Mayor is the amount of transparency, the access to the Council, and the ability to influence policy development through elected officials as opposed to one person, the Mayor, being the one to set the community's agenda
 - Many communities are trending toward appointing positions rather than electing the town officers. because governmental positions require specific professional municipal knowledge. Appointments allow for the development of consistent sound long term planning goals.
 - Should the Town Council consist of full-time positions; it is unrealistic to expect Councilors who are basically volunteers work full time jobs and then have a second job of addressing community needs and policies
 - While appointments provide continuity, does it allow for innovation and ingenuity

- There appears to be an imbalance of power between the administration and the legislative body, a lack of accountability; some of the problems discussed ten years ago still remain problems
- Many citizens feel government does not respond to the public; the issue of communication and a lack of transparency frustrates many and needs to be addressed
- There may be a need to improve pay scales to obtain the services of the “best of the best” employees
- Education of what government can do has created a disconnect between what citizens expect of the Town Manager as opposed to a Mayor. People need to be more aware of the abilities and limitations of government; Councilors need to expand their awareness of the community’s circumstances.
- While the Town makes long term plans, it appears that they are not often reviewed or they are forgotten
- The Committee needs to determine how to make government better and encourage community input. It should look to other communities and use their solutions where feasible to encourage community participation and awareness
- The Committee needs to listen to community suggestions and concerns.
- The Town needs to do a better job of community-citizen engagement, a need to create a culture of engagement and transparency.

Council President Sideris opened the discussion to the public.

Nick Cunningham – Asked how the members were chosen and how it was advertised. Council President Sideris stated that it was announced at the first few Town Council meetings of 2020 and people were requested to apply as well as on Watertown News. Some of the progress was delayed by COVID-19. He stated that he interviewed all respondents and selected a group that he felt would represent diverse opinions and skill sets.

Another person emailed a comment that a communication strategy should be completed first to keep the public engaged and involved. It was mentioned that a new CIO was hired and that his services would be utilized to update the online site, maintain background information, and allow for questions. It was suggested also that the Committee take the opportunity to tap into the community resources such as the School Committee, Library Trustees, Town Administration, Boards and Commissions, and other organized groups.

Daniel D’Amico – Stated that the first question should be – Where is Watertown headed in the future? The Town is growing, demographics are changing, climate change is a factor, and business is growing. Once the vision is determined, then it becomes easier to determine the type of government fits the vision.

Barbara Epstein – Would like to see a multi-modern approach for communication: Library, Senior Center, Churches, Cable

Jackie – Would like to see what other towns are doing in regards to union contract negotiations, what the process is, and how it protects employees

Nancy Hammett (?) – Would like to see a presentation how other cities of similar size are addressing their charter changes for those concerns mentioned at this meeting

Sue Ellen Hershman – Has the Committee addressed its own process for meetings. Council President Sideris stated it would work as other committees, open discussion by all and votes with the majority prevailing.

Nancy Hammett – Stated education is needed regarding how cities and Towns work; a review of municipal and state government would help. She expressed interest in more affordable housing in town and zoning matters. Council President Sideris stated some items listed were not charter questions but that if the Committee felt these were important matters, the Committee could request referrals to the Town Council for a more in-depth consideration.

Council President asked Mr. Ward to discuss how the Committee should consider proceeding. Mr. Ward stated the Center could provide some examples of potential governmental structures for the Committee’s review; examples from cities of comparable size; a presentation of municipal structures; and recent changes. He suggested the Committee create a sub-committee regarding communication and noted that Civic Plus has a feature that could provide an open forum for the Committee’s use.

Committee members stated

- A flow chart would be a helpful tool for understanding the Town’s governmental structure
- There is a need to raise awareness through community groups and social media
- It would be helpful to provide meeting dates on A frames to encourage people’s participation, along with notices in public places such as the Library and businesses

- A Communications subcommittee should be established to address this need
- The Charter Review Committee should have a separate link that leads directly to its page. Council President Sideris stated that a separate Notify Me link for Charter Review would be established.
- A basic class in Massachusetts government would be helpful
- It is necessary to create overall strategies before the details are defined to set the framework for upcoming discussions

President Sideris reverted to the questions from the public
 Jackie – Liked the open forum concept for reaching the public

S Ryan – Liked the review of other government forms. Would like to hear of other engagement tools that were used successfully in other communities

Debra Peterson – Premature to look at other models before the Town knows what it wants to fix. The Committee should reach out to the public for a consensus of what works and what needs fixing

Barbara Epstein – Concerned with the lack of diversity on the Committee. This limits the group's understanding of issues

Mr. Ward stated that he would collect the information discussed and would provide background on these topics and can upload them to the website. He stated all municipalities struggle with public engagement. He suggested that the 2015 Comprehensive Plan be uploaded to the website; it is an initial indicator of what the community goals are.

The Committee resumed its discussion

- If material is desired, the request should go through the Clerk of the Town Council so that the information could be disseminated later to everyone
- The Committee should also consider what is working well in the Town
- Education of governmental forms should be a starting point

In the question and answer section, the following was mentioned

- Janice Hudson – Education classes are essential; knowledge of government is often limited
- Jackie – Public involvement can often work around the lack of representational diversity on the Committee
- Diana Najarian – The Charter Review is expected to terminate at the end of the year unless an extension is requested. What is the status on this? Council President Sideris stated that an extension will be requested but there is no set time for the end of discussion; this will occur when the Committee has worked through the process
- Marcy Buckingham – Would like to know who is attending. Council President Sideris stated this is a challenge for all public meetings; it is something that will be reviewed to see if there is a way to see other participants.

In the following panel discussion, it was suggested that the Committee make a specific list of ways to encourage public engagement and have the Committee vote to endorse the recommendations. Council President Sideris suggested that this be put on the agenda for the next meeting. Members continued to discuss the process for future meetings.

Mr. Ward stated he would begin gathering other charter documents, and websites, and obtain material from the previous Charter Review in 2010 that can be on the website. He would work on gathering information for education and outreach.

Council President committed to having the materials sent to the Committee members prior to the next meeting. He did not feel it would be feasible to have the Collins Center prepare an educational forum prior to the next meeting on November 17, 2020 (The meeting on November 3, 2020 would not be held as it is election night.) The establishment of a Communications Committee would be handled at the next meeting in a process that is acceptable to the Review Committee.

Councilor Woodland moved to have the Council President form a Sub-Committee on Public Outreach. There being no second, the motion was not considered.

4. Adjournment

Councilor Feltner moved to adjourn; Councilor Piccirilli seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Marilyn W. Pronovost