



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

MINUTES

MEETING OF THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 6:00 PM MEETING WILL BE LIMITED TO REMOTE PUBLIC ACCESS ONLY

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 called a Meeting of the Charter Review Committee, consisting of the Town Council as a whole and six additional voters to be appointed by the Council President, said meeting was held on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:01 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 had 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 is 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 6:01 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, and members Marcia Giro, Anne Fitzpatrick, Jonathan Hecht, Leo Martin, James Mello, and William Oates. Also present was Michael Ward, Director of the Collins Center.
2. Review and Approval of Minutes of October 20, 2020
Councilor Piccirilli moved to accept the minutes October 20, 2021; Mr. Mello seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.

Councilor Piccirilli moved to accept the [minutes of the Communications Subcommittee for January 4, 2021](#); Councilor Woodland seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.
3. Reaction to the Panel Discussions from Previous Meetings
Members were asked about their reactions to the previous panels:

- The panels were helpful and the diversity of the panels was appreciated
- The discussion showed that in either form of government, the success of the governing body relates to the people
- The discussions were robust, and the speakers were frank when asked questions
- The communication issue is paramount
- In creating a vision, it is more work for a Town Council to get one that represents varying views while a Mayor's vision is easier to advance
- It seemed that the mayor is more directly responsible to the citizenry than a Town Council and this seems more efficient
- Watertown currently seems to have a skeleton staff
- Some items for consideration in the Charter Review are the addition of more councilors; increasing checks and balances in the Charter; and providing more technology and its tools, all to enhance a less reactive governmental approach.
- The discussion demonstrated that the communication can be one-sided with a Mayor and can have negative effects while a Town Council requires a majority to create a harmful governmental environment
- While many options were being provided by the speakers, many panelists and participants did not see that these same options are already being done in Watertown; many of the processes are in place
- It was surprising that some mayoral forms of government had no financial person to complete their budget
- Communication seems to be the main issue as the Town is doing many of the desired practices; people need to be aware of the positives
- The idea of the Community Participation officers seems like something that should be considered
- The idea of a 311 support where a resident could make a single call to get answers would be beneficial along with data collection and reports for review
- A concern was raised about how the public may participate in these Charter Review meetings and how they will receive a response to their concerns

4. Finish Discussion of Themes Not Yet Discussed (i.e., Vision)

Mr. Ward stated some considerations were

- What is a vision?
- Is it clear?
- Where is it located?
- Who sets it?
- How is it revised and implemented?
- Is any of it problematic?
- What needs to be changed?

In the discussion, these ideas were expressed:

- Watertown lacks a vision and fails to promote and exploit opportunities that the Town has such as places of note like the Charles River area; The Town has let these chances pass it by. The Town needs to see its beauty and fit a vision in one of last bastions of land development in the area
- The Town does not promote the many good things that it does, and it has an obligation to do so
- Development has increased but the Town needs to have a cohesive plan of what it wants Watertown to be. While development cannot be stopped, it can be guided to provide for Watertown's view of itself and the Town's vision can limit certain things that are not desired.
- While many of the suggested positive programs may have been implemented, people are not aware of them and some programs do not work well
- A vision should be something that looks forward, but Watertown seems to be reactive; the Comprehensive Plan seems redundant, and it does not mean anything

- The Town has programs, but are they reviewed and improved; it is not producing a good product; mitigation from developers is minimal
- Vision is important and it expresses itself through the budgetary guidelines; this needs to be translated to a communal vision. Government needs to articulate to the community that vision. Some changes to the Charter should require community meetings where government is responsive to the public and presents itself to the public.
- The Town has a vision that is expressed annually in the Budget statement and is presented to the public usually in an hour presentation. Also, the document is online. Other Departments have their vision, or plan, statements online.
- There is a need to clarify the scope of the policy making power of the Town Council. Policy making should be the responsibility of elected officials; the Charter needs to strengthen officials' ability to set policy; the current Charter does not set much policy beyond the budget.
- There is a need to clarify the mechanisms for policy setting that can be scrutinized by the electorate, and there needs to be a method for holding people accountable for implementing policies
- There are some rule-making procedures that were allowed to go to the executive that should be retained by the Town Council
- Appointments to board and commissions reflect the Town's vision and elected officials could be more involved in these appointments.
- Many Councilors do work with their constituents on an informal basis; this should be codified into something that's acceptable
- The Design Guidelines are used and certainly were applied in the RMUD construction
- Watertown needs to be more engaged with its citizens; many people would like to get involved but do not know how; the Town has many professionals that it is not tapping into
- People could be engaged by participating in Ad Hoc Committees; government should not be expecting people to come to them, government should be reaching out to people
- Department heads are not engaging with people; there could be "TED" talks to inform people what services they provide
- Vision comes from the bottom up and it needs to be solicited
- There is a difference between a vision of the community and the vision for the Charter (Mayoral v. Town Council), there is a recognition that communication needs to improve, and the message of the city needs to be made public and government needs to make it easier to participate.
- Vision for government becomes a decision of whether policy is made by consensus or by one person. The Town has been involved in policy making projects such as the Comprehensive Plan and the Economic Development Plan, each of which took three years to complete in order to allow for public input; with a Town Council these plans were a grass roots movement and not a top-down concept and the public input process gets messy
- Policy making can be completed by a Council whether it is a Town Council or a City Council; a Mayor is not a dictator because he or she is elected
- Vision should be an expression of the Town's values (does it value diversity, equity, economic growth?) and the values are expressed in goals that established in plans that need to be implemented for which the community holds the people in power accountable
- While the Town has plans, there does not seem to be follow up on the plans; some of the problem is due to insufficient staffing. Many people would like more input in the budget planning or an explanation of why something is not included
- The Town is facing large growth – much of the mixed-use areas are changing to Bio-Tech labs. It takes time to bring the public into the change

- The Town does not seem to be willing to discuss its failures and learn from them
- There is a hope that the Preamble can spell out the community values
- If you do good things but no one knows about it, what good is that? The Town falls short on that, but it can use some suggestions from other communities to improve communication.
- There seems to be a vacuum of action with the Town Council; agendas are skimpy; no Councilor has ever taken a survey of its constituents; and they need to get out into the community
- People seem to have good ideas that they need to press forward; put it writing so that it can be worked on by the Council
- Feedback and diversity make systems stronger because they adapt to the needs; the Preamble should identify the Town's core values that can be translated into programs, policies, plans, processes, and practices. In turn these can be converted into metrics that can be evaluated. It seems that the evaluation piece is missing. The Town needs to advance a wholistic vision for not just a few years but for a future
- Watertown is reactionary and not visionary; searching the website is a passive activity; someone needs to promote the activities; if a resident gets their information through informal conversation, why isn't the rest of the community aware of the information

Council President Sideris went through the [chat comments](#).

- ✓ Some charters discussed seem to provide for important expectations for communication and engagement that holds officials accountable
- ✓ Government functions only as well as the people serving
- ✓ The need for a consensus to accomplish anything is regressive and slows progress
- ✓ There is a need for a more robust set of metrics to determine a range of outcomes: financial, school, and plans accomplishments; it is difficult to judge the outcomes because there is a lack of reporting requirements
- ✓ The organization chart should be available to all
- ✓ The low number of participants reflects the degree of public engagement in government and that reflects government's lack of outreach to the public
- ✓ All elected officials currently are part-time, a mayor would be a full-time elected position
- ✓ With Covid, the Town is losing local businesses and a sense of identity; the Town's vision needs to honor its businesses and artists
- ✓ Is vision the same as preamble
- ✓ Vision is timely; preamble is more universal
- ✓ The Town needs to consider what is unique about Watertown? What is the soul of Watertown? How is this uniqueness preserved and promoted?
- ✓ The Budget is different than the Town Vision
- ✓ There is a disconnect between what politically connected citizens and what Watertown residents see as a Town vision; more communication is needed at every level
- ✓ Every plan and ordinance should have a list of goals and a timeline to obtain the metrics; there should be a reporting and review schedule; and the budget should be a way of determining if the Town is executing the Vision
- ✓ The Preamble should serve as the basis of how the community examines all aspects of government
- ✓ The decision regarding the form of government should not be determined before it is decided what accountability involves
- ✓ There are many plans but no assessment of the plans or their progress
- ✓ If a Councilor feels powerless, why is that? Is it due to the form of government, the people in government, or both?

- ✓ A Mayor is elected for his/her vision; it is not a top-down vision; it is the vision selected by the majority of voters
- ✓ Mayors are elected by people who believe in a platform; the mayor uses a strategy to achieve that platform
- ✓ The Town should reconsider the makeup of the Town Council. Most At-Large Councilors live in the same area
- ✓ There is a lack of competitive newspapers; therefore, it is incumbent on government to reach out to engage citizens to solicit ideas
- ✓ There is a lack of documents online; those that are available are hard to find; perhaps they can be rearranged
- ✓ The performance of the Town Manager's evaluation is completed in executive session, but the Town never learns what occurred in the executive session
- ✓ There is a need for a timeline for public comment

The meeting returned to member comments:

- Under state statute, a city council may only accept, reduce, or reject a financial request; it cannot increase the funding; the city council is not voting on the budgetary items, it is voting on the bottom line of the total budget; the mayor is dictating the form of government
- The request for a Participation Officer is something that could be referred to Committee and be worked on
- If the town selects a mayor, the town will not be held hostage to a mayor because he/she can be removed in two years; in some ways many feel that the Town Council is holding people hostage because it is difficult to change the makeup of the Council. The Town Council appears to be fear mongering
- Many things are getting done but it is a frustrating process
- There are different facets to vision: Vision as a preamble that discusses big ideas for the community; vision for the comprehensive plan but it has been hard to track the metrics of completion with regard to the plan; and the vision of the person running for office. The person running should state their personal vision and then they can be held accountable for their ability to complete that vision.

5. Begin General Discussion of Mayor v. Manager Forms of Government

Due to the length of the conversation on the previous topic, this topic was not addressed.

6. Discussion of Next Steps

Mr. Ward stated that he was taking extensive notes and that this could serve as a basis for future discussions. Council President Sideris stated that soon, there will be a way for people to submit Charter changes online. It was suggested that members be provided with information as to what changes would be specifically discussed at each meeting. Mr. Ward stated that once the decision is made of a Mayor or Town Manager administration, then the course of the discussions can occur methodically.

A concern was raised that the Committee should not rush into deciding on the form of desired government. There should be some education of the provisions of Watertown's current charter, and there is a need for the public outreach to get started before this question is discussed.

7. Communications Committee Update

Ms. Ciros stated the Committee that there is a banner running on the Watertown News website and an ad on Cable News; a flyer should be ready for distribution soon; and sandwich boards are being completed. There was a concern raised about making changes to the website; the Committee was asked to submit their request in writing.

Town Council Sideris stated that the Preamble Committee would consist of Councilor Palomba, Councilor Feltner, and Mr. Oates. He asked Councilor Palomba to chair the committee.

A question was raised as to whether there would be a public forum to get the public's opinion.

8. Next Meeting – February 16, 2021

9. Adjournment

Mr. Mello moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Piccirilli moved to second the motion. The motion was approved 14 – 1 on a roll call vote. All members voted in the affirmative except for Councilor Gannon who voted in the negative.

Minutes prepared by Marilyn W. Pronovost.