

Harvard Charter Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2017
Hildreth House Dining Room

Members present: Paul Cohen (Chair), Sharon McCarthy, Stephanie Opalka, Ron Ostberg, Charles Redinger, Peter Warren. Members absent: Rick Maiore, George McKenna, Cindy Russo.

Paul called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

There was no public comment.

Members approved the March 7 and March 19 meeting minutes.

Draft Charter

Charles pointed out that all terms of service should apply to both elected and appointed boards. The draft charter will be corrected. He also asked about the deletion of the list of appointed boards. Other commissioners said that the list was taken out because was limiting and had become unwieldy.

Charles raised three discussion topics about the draft:

- If the charter were passed, there would need to be some transition guidance.
 - Sharon said that some charters address the transition within the charter. There is a section called “Transition” that explains how policies will change, and they can specify that the first review will be in five, not 10, years. Some charters also explain the appointing process, which make it more transparent to residents.
 - Stephanie said that they could also explain that most boards will not be replaced in their entirety in the transition, which might take the uncertainty out of it for many people.
- He would advocate for language for appointing boards that includes criteria for the profile of the board, not just the qualifications of each board member. He said that the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) specifies how to appoint a balanced board. On the other hand, he added, maybe having balance on the board would keep the board from meeting its objectives.
 - Ron said that the political process follows all the way through: a Select Board that votes with a 3-2 split would probably make appointments that reflect the 3-2 split.
 - Peter said he has never seen that as an issue.
 - Sharon said that she thinks it would become apparent that the Select Board would have to appoint people who would work well together to accomplish their goals, if the Select Board believes in the vision – planning – policy – budget paradigm.
 - After more discussion, Charles said he thinks that some guidelines or description would be appropriate. He will get copies of the ANSI standards.
- He asked if it is definite that town could have the elections in November.
 - Sharon said that she is still checking on it.
 - Paul said that there is a way to manage that.

To clear up an open issue from the March 16 meeting, Stephanie moved and Charles seconded that they approve Section 4-6 as written. Approval was unanimous.

Communication

Town Meeting – Annual Town Meeting has been rescheduled from Saturday, April 1, to Monday, April 3, and Wednesday, April 5. Paul will not be available so Ron will deliver the commission's report. Discussion followed about the content of the report and handout. Ron will create the document and have it edited. Peter will print it out for Town Meeting.

Public Hearings – The April 6 planned public hearing will be rescheduled because of the changed Town Meeting schedule. Discussion followed about the best dates for the public hearings. Members agreed that feedback from the boards should precede the public hearings so that feedback could be summarized. (See proposed schedule of meetings below.)

Discussion followed about how the public hearings should be structured.

- Ron suggested that the public hearings be structured in two cycles: one for the executive function and one for participation. Small breakout groups would work with flip charts to record their reactions to the proposed changes. If they think something in the proposed charter will not work, they can propose their ideas. Each group reports its findings and that is how the commission collects information.
- Sharon suggested listing the problems that have been raised to the commission, what the commission is proposing, and, if the proposal is opposed, what is a new proposal? She also suggested using that model for the boards meetings, too.
- Charles said it is the commission's responsibility to give its rationale for its positions and asked how the commission will respond if it hears that many people are opposed to a proposal.
- Ron said that the commission is just starting to engage residents to see what they have to say. If they have strong arguments to support a position, then the commission will have to deliberate and decide what to do.
- Stephanie expressed concern that the two-year-term proposal will distract people from all the other suggestions. Ron proposed that time limits be set for each discussion.

All agreed that it is important to have a good turnout at the public hearings.

League of Woman's Voters program – Sharon announced that the league is inviting Mike Ward of the Collins Center of UMass Boston, a consultant, to give a voter education presentation on town charters, although no date has been set yet. She had a preliminary list of questions to ask the consultant and asked for suggestions of more questions from the commission. Ron suggested that the consultant be asked what other town's are doing to address high level issues like communication and planning.

Paul was concerned about the timing with all the public hearings that are currently set up and the deadlines the commission is working with. The preliminary draft is due August 14 and the final report to the Legislature is due October 12. The final draft would be voted on at Annual Town Meeting in 2018.

The commission suggested that LWV bring in the consultant in June. Sharon said she would check with the league.

Charles suggested that the current draft charter be considered v.1, revisions after the public hearing be v.2, and the revisions after the LWV meeting be v.3.

Peter suggested contacting an attorney that has been recommended to him who has dealt with the legal issues with charters. No action was taken.

Next Steps

- Ron – review ATM presentation and send for editing
- Laura/Stephanie – edit ATM presentation
- Peter – print ATM presentation
- Paul – invite board to attend scheduled meetings
- Peter – find venues for the hearings and meetings
- George – rewrite Section 5-5
- Stephanie and Peter – update the chart

Next meetings (proposed):

Thursday, April 13, 7 p.m. – regular meeting

Tuesday, April 25, 7 p.m. – meeting with the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and
Capital Planning and Investment Committee

Tuesday, May 2, 7 p.m. – meeting with the Planning Board and School Committee

Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m. – public hearing

Thursday, May 11, 7 p.m. – public hearing

Thursday, May 25, 7 p.m. – regular meeting

Peter will schedule the venues with Town Hall.

Paul adjourned the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Laura Andrews, Recorder