



# TOWN OF NORTON CHARTER COMMISSION

Monday, August 17, 2020 at 7:00 P.M.  
Via Remote Participation Only

Town Clerk Date/ Time Stamp

RECEIVED  
NORTON TOWN CLERK  
2020 OCT 29 P 4:14

Continued to Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9:00 AM at the Norton Library  
Park gazebo adjacent to the Public Library at 68 East Main Street

## ~MINUTES~

**1. Call to Order: Roll Call, Ask / Announce Recording**

The August 17, 2020 Public Hearing of the Charter Commission was called to order at 7:00 PM, by Ms. Laura Parker, Chair.

Members Present: Ms. Janey Goodwin, Mr. Dave Heaney, Ms. Denise Luciano, Ms. Sandy Ollerhead, Mr. Kevin Schleicher, Mr. Keith Silver, Ms. Kerry Snyder, and Mr. David Wrenn.

**2. August 17, 2020 session of the Public Hearing on the Preliminary Report and Charter pursuant to MGL Chapter 43B**

**a. Introduction, Overview, Goals and Guidelines of the Hearing**

Ms. Parker began the public hearing by giving an overview of the preliminary report. She explained the goals and guidelines for the hearing and then opened up the public comment section of the hearing by asking for any questions or feedback from the public.

**b. Public Comment Open**

Maureen Sroczynski suggested that the Conservation Commissioner be included in the Department of Public Works (Section 2-11a). Ms. Parker explained that the Charter Commission did consider this and decided to keep the Conservation Commission separate based on guidance from the Town Attorney as well as what we had seen in our research. Ms. Sroczynski also stated that she doesn't see the need for a Conservation Commissioner if the Conservation Commission is appointed by the Council, especially if we are going to have a Town Engineer.

Ms. Sroczynski asked who will appoint the Town Attorney. Ms. Parker responded that the hiring is done by the Town Manager. She asked if Town Council serves as both executive and legislative branch to which Ms. Parker explained that the Town Council serves strictly as the legislative branch.

Ms. Sroczynski asked if there should be an Ethics Commission to hold individuals accountable to ethical standards. Ms. Parker explained that it is up to the discretion of the Town Manager to set the policies and guidelines and that the Town Council would hold the Town Manager responsible for this.

Ms. Sroczynski suggested having a volunteer citizen involved in the Transition Committee (Section 9-6f). She also asked whether Robert's Rules of Order will be used to guide all meetings of the Council and other committees. Ms. Parker indicated that she felt the Town Attorney would be inclined to let the bodies choose for themselves whether to adopt Robert's Rules of Order.

Bill Gouveia asked for clarification in Section 2-6c. He asked whether one councilor can postpone a vote once or whether every councilor can do it once on a particular issue. Mr. Wrenn responded that it is once per issue. Mr. Gouveia asked if that should be clearer in the language to explain that.

Mr. Gouveia expressed concern on allowing the president of the Council to make appointments to standing committees rather than the Council itself (Section 2-9). He also expressed concern that a member can be removed at the sole discretion of the council president, particularly with the residents serving on different committees. He felt that if the president is going to remove someone, other than reassigning a council member, that person should have the right to a hearing to have their say in front of the town.

Mr. Gouveia asked whether the Council can put forth their own nominee when there is a vacancy in a multiple member body (Section 3.5). Ms. Ollerhead explained that only the body with the vacancy can put a name forward in order to give them a little more say in the appointment. Mr. Gouveia suggested that the language could be clearer in that section.

Mr. Gouveia expressed concern with the process of the Town Manager appointing multiple member bodies (Section 4.3(ii)). If the Town Manager appoints someone to a committee and that person is not confirmed, the Council has to wait for the Town Manager to pick a new candidate. This creates the possibility of a stalemate when the Town Manager insists that is the person that they want. He would like to see a rule that states if the Town Manager's appointment is not confirmed, you must go onto the next candidate and provide a certain time limit where that vacancy has to be filled.

Mr. Gouveia has a concern that the Council can cut items in the budget but it can't add to them (Section 6.5b). Under the current system, the Finance Committee has the ability to recommend additions.

In regards to Sections 7.3g and 7.4c, Mr. Gouveia is afraid that requiring 15% of the total number of voters provides a political advantage and an incentive not to vote. Further, he noted that registration jumps during years where there is an override, which sets the bar even higher.

Mr. Gouveia would like to see that ordinary citizens who don't hold town positions/offices are accounted for in the Charter Review Committee (Section 8.2b). He suggested including language stating the last two positions appointed by the Council President and Town Manager must be people who do not hold any town position or serve on any board.

Laurel expressed concern about the elimination of the Finance Committee and asked who will be scrutinizing the details, particularly in terms of contracts. Ms. Parker explained there will be a subcommittee of the Town Council made up of Town Council members as well as possibly members of the public.

Mark Sweeney asked for clarification on the Finance subcommittee. He felt that taking an eleven-member board down to a five-member board would create a lot of work for those members. Ms. Ollerhead clarified that the new subcommittee would only be responsible for financial matters, unlike the current Finance Committee.

Aimee Sawyer further clarified the role of the Finance Committee. She explained that they currently don't review contracts. She also felt it would be less work for the new subcommittee given how much time the current Finance Committee spends



reviewing all of the zoning and planning articles. She felt that the way the new charter is structured is actually going to be a more straightforward way to manage the finances of the town since it is pulling them out from the Town Meeting process.

Tristan Grieve asked how the Charter Commission is trying to make the government more accessible to young people and whether there been any discussion about having a Youth Council in order to get people more involved at an earlier age. Ms. Parker responded that the Charter Commission was concerned with overall lack of participation and voter apathy. She is hoping some of these changes will energize all people to become more active and vote more often.

Ms. Parker clarified that there will be no changes to the School Committee.

**c. Motion to fix the time to which to adjourn: August 22, 2020**

Motion was made by Ms. Snyder to fix the time to which to adjourn to August 22, 2020. Seconded by Mr. Heaney. Vote: Ms. Goodwin – yes; Mr. Heaney – yes; Ms. Luciano – yes; Ms. Ollerhead – yes; Ms. Parker – yes; Mr. Schleicher – yes; Mr. Silver – yes; Ms. Snyder – yes; Mr. Wrenn – yes. MOTION CARRIES.

**3. August 22, 2020 session of the Public Hearing on the Preliminary Report and Charter pursuant to MGL Chapter 43B**

**a. Introduction, Overview, Goals and Guidelines of the Hearing**

Ms. Parker began by giving an overview of the Preliminary Report. She explained the goals and guidelines for the hearing and then opened up the public comment section of the hearing by asking for any questions or feedback from the public.

**b. Public Comment**

Ralph Stefanelli expressed concern about a proposition 2 ½ override. Ms. Parker explained that the Charter Commission cannot change anything about Proposition 2 ½. It will always stay under state law and require a vote by the residents of Norton. Mr. Stefanelli asked what the commission meant by a “strong town manager”. Ms. Parker explained that right now we have a strong Town Manager and we are recommending we retain that. We want a Town Manager who is responsible for making the decisions of the day to day operations of the town.

Mr. Stefanelli asked whether this could be reversed in the future if people don’t like what the Charter Commission has done. Ms. Parker explained that anything in the charter with the exception of the form of government can be changed by vote. If anyone wanted to change the form of government, they would need to elect a new Charter Commission and follow the same process that this commission followed.

Mr. Stefanelli asked whether having the Town Council serve as the Water and Sewer Commission would give them access to their funds. Ms. Parker clarified that Town Council will only set rates and hear appeals for water/sewer. The day to day operations and the management of funds will be handled by the DPW director. The Town Council has no day to day dealings with the DPW or its funds or its budget. Mr. Wrenn further clarified that the structure of the water department as far as the enterprise fund is not changing.

Mr. Stefanelli felt that the Housing Authority would be better as an elected position. He also asked whether there was an Ethics Commission in our charter to check out people who are appointed. Ms. Ollerhead responded that members of committees would still have to take the state ethics tests.

Bob Briscoe asked whether people that are currently on the town boards and committees will retain their positions. Ms. Parker explained that the transition

provisions in the charter provide that all members of current boards and committees except for the Select Board and Water and Sewer Commission will retain their positions.

John Freeman expressed his concern that we are taking power from the people by taking away Town Meeting. He also felt we didn't need a DPW director.

**4. Adjournment**

Motion was made by Mr. Heaney to adjourn the Charter Commission meeting at 9:42 AM. Seconded by Ms. Ollerhead. Vote: Ms. Goodwin – yes; Mr. Heaney – yes; Ms. Luciano – yes; Ms. Ollerhead – yes; Ms. Parker – yes; Mr. Wrenn – yes. MOTION CARRIES.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sandra Ollerhead

Minutes approved by the Board or Committee on: 9/14/20

Chairman Signature: Sandra L Parker