

Groton Town Charter Review Committee

Minutes June 16, 2015 (Approved)

**Charter Review Committee**

**Minutes**

**June 16, 2015 (Inaugural Meeting)**

Attendees: Jane Allen, Michael Bouchard, Robert Collins, Scott Harker, Michael Manugian, Bud Robertson, Stuart Schulman

The inaugural meeting was called to order at 5:00 by Mr. Bouchard. He administered the oath to those who had not been sworn and briefly discussed the Committee's obligations under the Open Meeting Law.

Committee organization:

Mr. Manugian was elected Chairperson by unanimous vote.

Mr. Robertson was elected Vice-chair by unanimous vote.

Mr. Bouchard raised objection to the need of a committee member to record the minutes of the meeting. He suggested that an outside party be engaged to take the minutes so that all members could fully participate. Ms. Allen suggested that the recording of minutes was not taxing as the minutes could be brief, essentially recording votes and the gist of a discussion. Mr. Bouchard suggested that the Charter Review Committee will be discussing important issues and that complete minutes were appropriate. Mr. Manugian and Ms. Allen objected to spending money that was not in the budget. Mr. Haddad, from the audience, stated that the money was in the budget but that he would like to ask the Fall Town Meeting to replenish any monies spent.

Mr. Bouchard motioned that the Committee hire a person to record minutes of the meetings. It passed 5 to 2, with Mr. Manugian and Ms. Allen dissenting. Mr. Bouchard agreed to work with the Town Manager to arrange for someone to take minutes.

Mr. Bouchard was elected Clerk of the Committee by unanimous vote.

Goals:

The committee brainstormed a list of goals (not ranked):

- Operate with awareness of and compliance to the Open Meeting Law
- Consider public comments with the rationale provided
- Review the charter in detail
- Recommend changes to the charter for improvement
- Seek public input; be transparent
- Establish and communicate the process
- Remove superfluous items
- Make the charter simpler
- Define the end product – a report to the town

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- Set a time line
- Establish a process (for decision making?)

The committee had a discussion about the process of changing the charter. Mr. Haddad, from the audience, offered that there are two ways to change the charter. One process is to present to town meeting, and if a positive vote, submit legislation to the state. Mr. Haddad recommended that town counsel be consulted to recommend a process. Lauren Goldberg, of Kopelman and Paige, is an expert in this area. Mr. Bouchard will contact Ms. Goldberg to inquire about availability to meet with the Committee.

Russ Harris, from the audience, informed the Chair that he was audio-recording the meeting. The Chair announced that the meeting was being recorded.

Mr. Bouchard related to the committee that the IT Department would support with the establishment of a web page and a generic email account. This led to a further discussion of methods to provide public input. Ms. Allen and Mr. Robertson said members should review input and bring it to the committee. Everyone who submitted input should be communicated with. It was not clear if this meant an acknowledgment or disposition of their input.

Mr. Manugian suggested that meetings should be held in the evening, at 6 or 7 pm. Mr. Harker suggested the meetings be held starting at 7:30 pm. The committee voted unanimously to begin meetings at 7:00 pm. The committee further voted unanimously to hold meetings on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm.

The charter requires the committee to hold at least two public hearings. Discussion points for content included:

- Explain the process to the public
- Explain the end goal
- Committee is not limited to two public hearings
- Committee will request that public input be in writing so as to be clear on the input. Some members did not prefer to accept anonymous input even in writing. Others thought it should be considered, especially if the rationale was strong. Anonymous input cannot be acknowledged. Anonymous input could be delivered by mail or town hall drop box, but necessarily not by email. The committee agreed that anonymous input would be accepted.
- Town officials and department heads will be “interviewed” during the process
- A final public hearing should include the proposals and recommendations of the committee

Mr. Harker suggested that public hearings will be tough to schedule for the summer months and expect good attendance. Mr. Robertson suggested that the committee set up a milestone chart. Mr. Collins reminded all that hearings should be scheduled before November 1 to avoid holiday conflicts. A dry run should be scheduled in January. Mr. Manugian volunteered to formulate a schedule to be distributed before the next meeting.

To comply with the Open Meeting Law, committee members were cautioned against “reply all” to an email sent to committee members. Information may be distributed to members if it is “distributive” in nature. This includes administrative matters (e.g. scheduling) and informational material, as long as no opinions are expressed. Deliberation amongst a quorum of members must take place at an open

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meeting. Serial deliberation, when deliberation of less than a quorum extends to a quorum through subsequent conversations, email or other communications, is a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

It was pointed out that anything submitted to the committee is a public record under the Public Records Law.

Mr. Schulman observed that the committee members should be very familiar with the charter. It was suggested that the committee review the charter individually and as a group in detail. Mr. Collins suggested that members could consider ideas about things getting “fixed” with respect to how that issue is addressed in the charter. Mr. Harker added that implications of changes should also be considered. Mr. Robertson suggested that members assess the current charter in detail before suggesting changes. Ms. Allen agreed. The homework for members is to review Articles 1 through 3 in detail with comments for the next meeting.

Mr. Manugian suggested a format to consider public comments:

- Who submitted
- Contact information
- What is being suggested
- Why (rationale)

He further suggested that each comment be acknowledged as received, and that the committee keep a list of topics suggested by the public.

Mr. Harris, from the audience, suggested that the committee look into having the meetings recorded. Mr. Bouchard will contact the Cable Advisory Committee.

Mr. Robertson suggested that committee members review other town charters. He further suggested that larger towns’ charters be reviewed as Groton is growing.

The next meeting will be held Wednesday June 24 at 7:00 PM. Suggested agenda:

- Review minutes of June 16
- Review of charter Articles 1 through 3.
- Review of action items
- Review proposed schedule
- Review proposed process
- Review proposed goals
- Set public hearing date and agenda
- Report on other town charters

Meeting was adjourned at 6:50 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Bouchard, Clerk