

Town of Groton - Charter Review Committee
Minutes of June 24, 2015

Date of meeting: June 24, 2015

Meeting convened at 7:02 pm.

Attendees: Jane Allen, Michael Bouchard, Michael Manugian, Bud Robertson, Stuart Schulman
Attending by remote participation: Scott Harker

Not in attendance: Robert Collins

Mr. Manugian announced that Mr. Harker was attending the meeting by remote participation (via speakerphone). He stated that all the remote participation requirements were met, and explained how remote participation worked. It's important to note that all votes must be taken by roll call.

Mr. Manugian stated that he was to ask for a vote to request that the Selectmen designate the Committee as having Special Municipal Employee status. Mr. Bouchard described Mr. Collins' situation in that he represents private parties before town boards in his profession. That is prohibited under the State's Conflict of Interest law. However, the law recognizes that situations like this may occur, and rather than potentially excluding residents from participating in town government, has implemented a status of Special Municipal Employee (SME). The SME status has to be granted by the Board of Selectmen. It applies to all members of the Committee. A motion was made to request that the Selectmen designate this Committee with SME status. It passed with unanimous vote.

Lauren Goldberg, Kopelman and Paige, will be discussing charter review processes with the Committee on July 1 at 7:00 PM. Members were asked to develop questions for Lauren. If Lauren forwards presentation materials, Mike B. will forward them to members.

The draft minutes of June 16 were reviewed. Several amendments were made. The minutes were approved as amended by a unanimous vote.

Mr. Manugian opened a discussion about scheduling the public hearing. The charter states that the committee will hold a hearing within 30 days of its organizational meeting. The committee currently has reserved July 22 for the hearing, but that is outside the 30 day window. Ms. Allen, Mr. Manugian and Mr. Collins are unavailable the prior week (week of July 13). Mr. Bouchard will contact town counsel for an opinion as to whether the public hearing could be held July 22 due to the unavailability of several members. The backup plan will be to hold the hearing on July 15 without some members present.

Mr. Manugian reviewed a draft document outlining the goals of the committee and its process. The document is entitled "Town of Groton Charter Review 2015-2016" and will be published in its most current form on the committee's web page. Mr. Manugian took detail notes to adjust the document. Comments are summarized to include:

- Committee members approved the goals section
- Discussion on collecting input and how to acknowledge to the submitter, organize the input and how to let submitters know when input would be discussed. It was determined that individual acknowledgements of receipt would be issued when possible. Mr. Bouchard volunteered to send these acknowledgements. The committee briefly discussed organizing

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input by topic and forwarding each agenda discussing topics to all people who had submitted and provided an email address.

- It was reiterated that input containing rationale would be the most productive to address in committee meetings. The goal was to discuss input offered by the public.
- It was agreed that multiple public input addressing similar topics would be consolidated for appropriate discussion.
- The goal of being as transparent as possible was affirmed.
- Public input received not having to do with the charter, but perhaps with a particular department's procedures (for example), would not be discussed by the committee. It will be forwarded to the appropriate department.

The committee's webpage will be hosted on the Town of Groton website. The webpage will contain at least the following information:

- Committee members
- Log of comments received from the public (note: submitter information not included on the web page)
- Documents referenced by the committee
- Links to the charter, bylaws and state law
- Committee agendas
- Committee minutes
- Committee master schedule

Ideas for the contents of the public hearing were discussed. While hearings are typically geared to accept public input, this hearing will additionally offer some education about the process the committee will use to review and potentially propose updates to the charter, the process the public can use to input content into the review, a way to track the committee's process and progress, the steps to change a charter and an overview of the charter. It is not expected that any proposals, if offered, would be discussed at the public hearing, but would be discussed at a relevant committee public meeting.

The committee suggested some rules for public input:

- Publish how to communicate with the committee
- Notify the public that any input received is a public record.
- Proposals must be submitted in writing.
- Proposals should include rationale
- Input would be acknowledged as received if submitted by email. The submitter will receive a log number of their input document.
- Anonymous input will be considered, but not acknowledged. It will be added to the log.
- Input to be received by August 29

Committee meetings will:

- Be posted in accordance with the open meeting law
- Notify email submitters of the agendas of meetings
- Identify public input under discussion by log number

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- Combine similar ideas for discussion purposes
- Not specifically identify submitters

There was general concern that much substantial input would not be received during the summer months.

Mr. Manugian suggested that members look at other town charters for good examples of content. It was noted to ask Lauren Goldberg for suggestions. Members would be designated to look at specific charters.

A specific review of Articles 1 and 2 of the charter ensued. Comments included:

- Add “passed at town ballot in May 2008” to the charter in history section.
- Consistent page titling (“Charter” on even pages; “Groton Code” on odd pages)
- Define “media” and “local newspaper”
- Add website address to Article 1
- Discussion selection of officers in town meeting (Ed. Note: town elections are considered part of the spring town meeting. Reference MGL Chapter 39)
- Discuss specific language money items in the fall
- Elaborate more on town offices (or officers)
- Add “conflict of interest” Section 2
- Identify what is state statue in the charter.
- Put into the charter if mailing a warrant should be to every household.
- Inform moderator who the replacement committee designee is so that the public can be informed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Bouchard, Clerk