

**Charter Review Committee (CRC)**  
**Town of Groton, Groton, MA 01450 978-448-1100**

**Meeting Minutes - Public Hearing July 22, 2015**

**Present:** Jane Allen, Michael Bouchard (Clerk (for committee), Town Clerk), Robert Collins, Scott Harker, Michael Manugian (Chair), Bud Robertson (Vice-Chair, Finance Committee), Stuart Schulman (BOS)

**Recorder:** Michael Bouchard

**Call to Order:** Chairman Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Mr. Manugian announced that this was the first of at least three public hearings the Charter Review Committee will hold. Committee members introduced themselves and identified each's appointing authority.

Mr. Bouchard read the legal notice for the hearing. He then announced the availability of a signup sheet to be put on the committee's distribution list, which was passed around in the audience. (Ed. Note: 13 attendees signed the sheet.)

Mr. Manugian explained that the hearing will have two parts. Part 1 will focus on the process that the committee will follow. The second part will focus on comments about the charter. Mr. Manugian then presented prepared slides. The slides are available in the committee file.

Audience comments about the committee's process

Ms. Collette: Appreciated the thoughtful process of the committee. She expressed a concern about the acceptance of anonymous comments in that the committee could expect inappropriate comments to be submitted.

Mr. Harris expressed a concern that the committee's approach will dissuade participation from people who have general comments about the charter and town governance not tied directly to charter provisions. He also was concerned that people who are not familiar with the charter's specifics would also be dissuaded for participating. Mr. Manugian clarified that the committee will accept general comments related to the charter. Mr. Bouchard commented that the committee was looking for the reasons behind any comments as well as the comment itself.

Ms. Sartini asked if the committee preferred 1 comment per submission form. Mr. Manugian stated that the committee preferred comments by email, and that there was no limit to the number of comments in an email. Ms. Allen commented that separate emails for topics would make it easier for the committee.

Mr. Pease commented that there are two factors to consider during this review: efficiency and effectiveness. He believes that the charter is efficient but there is opportunity to improve its

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effectiveness. His input is that the committee should consider changes in light of what customers (i.e. taxpayers and residents) care about. The committee needs more outreach to understand what customers want. Mr. Manugian stated that a communication plan was being developed by the committee, and asked that an “outreach plan” be added to the next committee meeting’s agenda.

Ms. Erickson stated that a strong tenet of the charter is checks and balances. The charter needs this.

Mr. Petropoulos agreed that outreach is important. He urged that all available media, including the Talk About Groton email list, be used. He asked the committee to think about ways to get information out and solicit information from the public. Mr. Schulman expressed some concern about getting input that “stuffed the ballot box”. Mr. Robertson agreed that the committee may get this, but that it was our responsibility to sort it out and discuss. Mr. Bouchard added that, while the committee will assess input, and make recommendations, all recommendations go to town meeting for consideration. Mr. Harker stated that this was the first time a charter review committee had been convened. The more the committee learns about an effective process, the better this process will serve as a template for future efforts.

Ms. Allen offered that members of the public can call any member of the committee to discuss ideas, or even speak with committee members at the grocery store. Mr. Manugian strongly recommends that input be in writing, however. Verbal communications can be misconstrued. If it’s in writing, the committee will have a better definition of what to discuss.

Audience comments about specific charter changes

Ms. Erickson made two suggestions, for the purpose of removing politics from Town Hall.

- Change the Finance Committee to be appointed, perhaps by the Town Moderator, or elected. This would strengthen checks and balances.
- The Personnel Board to be elected.

Ms. Gilbert suggested that a financial goal be added to the charter to find a balance between school and municipal spending, and explanations as to why spending increases may be different. The rationale for this idea is that Groton should express its view of what’s important to the town.

Mr. Hargraves suggested that the Finance Committee be appointed by the Moderator or elected to remove the Finance Committee from the political process. He also recommended that the Finance Committee have an active role in contract negotiations. Mr. Collins asked if other municipalities elect the Finance Committee. (Ed. Note: The town of Dunstable does elect their Finance Committee.) Ms. Allen stated that almost all towns in Connecticut elect Finance Committees. Mr. Harker asked if the Finance Committee will come to the Charter Review Committee to discuss. Mr. Hargraves agreed that this was the expectation.

Ms. Sartini stated that some things work well in the charter, and some not. She would like to see the Board of Selectmen have a more directional role in budget creation. The budget seems to grow at 2.5% every year – do we need it? Mr. Robertson related that the recently adopted financial policy for the town does require the setting of financial goals and metrics prior to the

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development of the budget. The Board of Selectmen, the Finance Committee and the Town Manager will set these goals and metrics. Ms. Sartini asked if this would be part of the charter.

Mr. Manugian commented that some suggestions belong in the charter and some are “supportive”, meaning should be incorporated into a bylaw or policy.

Mr. Cunningham stated that the charter is a framework for how we govern ourselves. Nothing in the charter prevents financial policies from being developed. Mr. Collins agreed, and stated that the charter implies this authority is available as the Board of Selectmen are designated as the chief policy making body.

Mr. Petropoulos said that a charter could require that the town set a financial direction, for example school and town spending. These policies for the year should have the ability to be prescribed annually. Ms. Allen asked if the Board of Selectmen set goals. Mr. Petropoulos stated that the Town Manager works to a general goal of improving services within the confines of Proposition 2 ½. Mr. Schulman stated that the new financial policy address this issue. Mr. Robertson stated that the new policy should enable financial priorities. This is the first year using the policy. Mr. Petropoulos proposed that the charter should make sure that the town has a public policy that requires the town to express priorities. Mr. Harris stated that the town meeting should be made aware of how the town is doing and why various goals were set.

Mr. Manugian, seeing no more comments were to be made, thanked the audience for the discussion of financial procedures.

The meeting and public hearing were adjourned at 8:07 PM.

The next meeting of the committee will be July 29 at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Bouchard, Clerk