

Charter Review Committee (CRC)

Town of Groton, Groton, MA 01450 978-448-1111

Meeting Minutes - September 9, 2015

At Town Hall

Present: Jane Allen (GDRSC), Robert Collins (BoS), John Giger, Clerk (FinCom), Michael Manugian, Chair (BoS), Bud Robertson, Vice Chair (FinCom), Stuart Schulman (BoS)

Recorder: Stephen Legge

Visitors: Judy Anderson, Ellen Baxendale, Barry Pease, Connie Sartini

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

Mr. Manugian announced Michael Bouchard has resigned from the committee for personal reasons, effective immediately. He read aloud the letter of resignation. Mr. Manugian said Mr. Bouchard has been a big contributor and will be sorely missed.

Discussion ensued concerning who on the committee would be willing to assume the role of Clerk for the committee. Mr. Giger was nominated and seconded to fill the position. He was elected unanimously. Mr. Manugian mentioned that Mr. Bouchard has offered to finish a few items he had begun earlier.

The BOS will choose and appoint a replacement for Mr. Bouchard in the next two weeks.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of Wednesday, September 2, 2015. Mr. Robertson offered several edits to the version edited by Mr. Manugian and passed out to the committee. The minutes were approved, as amended, unanimously by a vote of 5-0, with Ms. Allen abstaining due to absence from the meeting.

Announcements:

Chairman Manugian announced that September 18th is the final date for all, including the public, to submit proposed written changes to the charter.

Mr. Robertson attended the Veteran's breakfast at the Senior Center last week, made a ten minute presentation about the Charter review process and answered questions from the audience.

The next presentation coming up is the Women's Club lunch at the Senior Center on Wednesday September 16th. Mr. Schulman will speak and represent the Committee at that function.

Jane Allen and Michael Manugian will attend Jane Bouvier's local cable television show on September 10, 2015 to share information about the work of the Committee.

Ms. Sartini suggested copies of the Charter be made available to the public at Town Hall. Mr. Giger added that perhaps the log of comments submitted should also be made available. Mr. Manugian noted that both items will be available to view on the town's website. Ms. Allen said anyone may use the free computers at the public library to view the website, and help would be available from the staff.

De-briefing Discussion of Last Week's Meeting with the Town Manager and Department Heads:

Mr. Collins: He was impressed with the coverage and level of detail in Mr. Haddad's presentation. It was good to hear from the department heads too. It has been one of our better meetings.

Ms. Allen: She was not present at the meeting and would like to see the detailed recommendations that resulted from their deliberations.

Mr. Giger: He indicated he had not anticipated a consolidated list of recommended charter changes coming from a committee but rather thought department heads would make their own individual recommendations. He indicated the presentation provided excellent information and thoughtful recommendations.

Mr. Manugian: He would have liked to hear more of the presentation from the department heads.

Mr. Schulman: The most interesting part was when the staff spoke. He was impressed - the comment from them was heart-felt in his judgment. They are clearly very dedicated people. He was also impressed with the comments contrasting Groton with the way other towns operate. It seemed a universal feeling that Groton was on top in this respect. Mr. Schulman also commented he was impressed with the library director's perspective

Mr. Robertson: There are opinions expressed by a group, and then those expressed by individuals within a group. Everyone spoke – all said the same sort of thing. He is hopeful that individuals will speak up separately with their own opinions.

Mr. Manugian: It was clear all felt decisions could be made in a timely way and there was a lot of cooperation among departments.

Discussion of the Town's Organizational Relationships Chart:

Mr. Manugian passed out a draft organization chart (see Exhibit A) he has developed in collaboration with the Town Manager. It is color coded to show relationships specified in the Town Charter, and modeled after the chart presented by Mr. Haddad last week. Highlighted are elected officials and bodies, entities hired by the official to whom they report, entities appointed by the BOS, special committees selected for a certain purpose (for example to screen for Town

Manager, Fire Chief or Police Chief candidates), and entities appointed by the Town Manager and ratified by the BOS.

Mr. Manugian pointed out that not all town committees appear on this chart.

Mr. Schulman thought the Zoning Board of Appeal and the Historic District Commission were important to include on the new chart.

Mr. Pease commented the public library's budget is determined by the town, line by line. However, funds raised by the Trustees, including the endowment fund, are the Library's to use autonomously, as the trustees see fit. Groton Electric is also an autonomous department, responsible to the electric rate payers.

There was some discussion about the structure of the Finance Department (not the Finance Committee), and the need to expand and highlight that department on the organization chart.

Mr. Manugian will consider comments, talk to the Town Manager and re-issue the chart by email to the committee members.

Discussion of a Review Process for Submitted Changes to the Charter:

Mr. Manugian offered a draft of a detailed review process to the committee for their consideration (See Exhibit B).

Mr. Schulman: When would Town Counsel get involved in reviewing specific wording changes? Mr. Manugian answered, his draft is primarily for the committee's early steps in the review process - others, perhaps many, will get involved later in the process of reviewing and changing words.

Mr. Giger: A timeline is needed, working backward from the Spring Town Meeting, so we can see the big picture. Research and language subcommittees may have to keep minutes and perhaps even post meetings. What are the Open Meeting Law requirements in this regard? Mr. Manugian will research this question.

Mr. Collins: Regarding subcommittee tasks, he is concerned that one week (between full committee meetings) may not be enough time to process substantive issues.

Mr. Manugian expressed the concern we may have to limit public time for presentation and discussion in future meetings so that all will have a chance to speak. He specifically warned to avoid repeating points, making personal attacks and going off topic.

Ms. Allen: The committee may need to post in advance specific issues and voting to be done at public meetings.

Mr. Manugian asked members to consider subcommittees and chairing them. Mr. Collins expressed willingness to head the wording subcommittee. Mr. Manugian wished to be a member.

Mr. Manugian asked whether appointment of subcommittees and working out a schedule for discussing submissions from the public should be on our agenda for the next meeting.

Mr. Giger asked, if we discuss new ideas in meetings, how do they get into the formal list of comments (the log for public submissions)? Mr. Manugian asked if anyone would be willing to go through the minutes as they become available and extract appropriate information for the log. Ms. Allen offered to do this.

Ms. Sartini stated some public input may be more policy issues than actual charter changes. Mr. Manugian agreed and said such input would then be referred to the appropriate town entity.

Mr. Manugian asked if there were any more comments on the review process. There were none.

Ms. Baxendale commented the Town of Ayer has recently decided to reduce the number of selectmen from five to three. She asked if she may propose the same for Groton, since we have a town manager and may no longer need five selectmen. Mr. Manugian encouraged Ms. Baxendale to submit a Charter Review Change Submission form per the established process. Mr. Collins offered to do some research on why Ayer made this decision. Mr. Manugian said justification for changes proposed is helpful and makes a stronger case for change, but is not required for formal submission.

Other Business:

Mr. Manugian acknowledged input from the members on their availability for Wednesday meetings. He will compile the results and publish a meeting schedule through the end of the calendar year, attempting as many meetings weekly as possible. His criterion shall be a minimum of five members on any given Wednesday, excepting the need for urgent meetings.

Mr. Manugian invited any further comments from the public. There were none.

The meeting was adjourned with unanimous consent at 8:26 PM.

**** The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 23rd. ****

Exhibits:

1. Draft chart of town reporting structure
2. Draft detailed submission review process