

Town of Groton

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Charter Review Committee

Michael Manugian, Chair
Bud Robertson, Vice Chair
John Giger, Clerk
Jane Allen
Robert Collins
Michael McCoy
Stuart Schulman

Meeting Minutes

Date: September 23, 2015
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: Town Hall, 1st Floor Meeting Room, 173 Main Street, Groton
Attending: Bud Robertson, Michael Manugian, Michael McCoy, Jane Allen, Robert Collins, Stuart Schulman
Absent: John Giger
Visitors: Judy Anderson, Ellen Baxendale, Barry Pease
Handouts: Agenda, September 9, 2015 draft minutes

Michael Manugian convened the meeting at 7:05 pm. Michael Manugian welcomed Michael McCoy to the Committee as a new member.

Committee members first attended to the September 9, 2015 draft minutes. Several changes were made with edits to Bud Robertson's comments and mention was added regarding a September 10, 2015 local cable show appearance in the announcements section.

Michael Manugian stated that based on members' availability, the Committee can meet weekly on each Wednesday until the end of December 2015 except for November 11 (Veterans Day) and 25 (near Thanksgiving).

Robert Collins moved to approve the draft minutes as amended. Jane Allen seconded and the motion carried 4:0 (Michael McCoy abstained; Stuart Schulman and John Giger absent).

Michael Manugian introduced the idea of having the Committee make a brief Fall Town Meeting presentation about the charter review process and how the public might participate in the process. In the ensuing discussion, Committee members agreed with the concept so long as the presentation stayed brief. Michael Manugian will draft the text of that presentation so that the Committee can review and discuss presentation content at a future meeting.

Michael Manugian recounted for the public and any who had not reviewed the submitted comments on the Charter that there were a total of 159 submissions from 36 individuals or committees or groups. Of those submissions, there was a concentration in the areas of the Charter concerning the duties and areas of responsibility for the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager. Michael Manugian stated that he anticipates that the Committee review process would proceed in a section by section review after comments of a general nature are received.

Robert Collins asked whether members should review submissions independently outside of the Committee meeting and then gather and group some of the submissions into similarly themed categories. Michael Manugian agreed that it made sense to organize meetings by categorized themes such as Finance Committee appointments for example and invite all submitters on each theme to attend that scheduled meeting. Michael Manugian observed that these Committee meetings are not public hearings. People who have submitted comments will have first opportunity to speak although audience members will also be permitted to comment.

Jane Allen asked how these comments should be organized given the diversity of the submissions.

Stuart Schulman enters the meeting.

Michael Manugian advised that the Committee should organize comments in the order that mirrors the order of the Charter text as written. Michael Manugian will categorize and even include some extra Charter categories since not every submitted opinion correlates to a specific section of the Charter. He plans to share that reorganized report sorted by category with Committee members. At the next meeting, Committee members can review and refine this order and these assigned categories.

Michael Manugian reviewed the proposed organization of future meetings by going over the document he distributed last meeting titled "DRAFT Detailed Submission Review Process." Because subcommittee work is subject to the Open Meeting Law, Michael Manugian suggests that numbers 1, 8 and 9 under Each Meeting be revised to have subcommittee references changed to an individual member researching and working out wording independently rather than using the subcommittee process.

Based on a question from Stuart Schulman, Michael Manugian clarified that before a vote to accept or dispose of a submission, then there will be an opportunity for public comment prior to the vote. Specifically, Michael Manugian stated that if the Committee votes on a change in concept, then we have to agree that it is a good idea. Later, we will vote again on the exact wording. Michael Manugian summarized that the idea is to talk about the substance and vote on the substance and then talk about the wording and vote on the wording.

Michael McCoy asked about number 4 under Each Meeting. For number 4, a submission could be screened out of further consideration as it may be found to concern a topic unrelated to the Charter.

Barry Pease commented that some submitters are serving on the Committee and some are not. He asked the Committee how they intended to address that difference. Michael Manugian answered that when we get to a Committee member proposed submission, then that the Committee member with the comment/submission will propose it and then we will all discuss it including the Committee member proposing the change. There will be no expectation of a recusal as the entire purpose of the Committee is to have its members offer opinions about necessary or desirable changes to the Charter.

The individual Committee members assigned to research will be a job shared among members and not left to a single volunteer to research all issues. Stuart Schulman shared his experience with researching the single issue of electing Finance Committee members and that he is still waiting for word back from some of the outreach inquiries he initiated about other towns' experience and those inquiries were made more than a week ago.

Michael Manugian reminded the group that any wording change will have to work for the entire Charter, not just the single edited section. Members discussed whether assignment of a single person to address language wordsmithing would be ideal. The group agreed by consensus to see how large a job this is and how the process goes in practice before adhering to this assignment plan.

The Committee members discussed the advisability of asking for Town Counsel's assistance during the process. Michael Manugian advised against involving Town Counsel until the Committee has completed its initial draft of recommended charter changes. Stuart Schulman commented that in his view Town Counsel is an arrow in our quiver and we should hang on to it in case we need it. In the discussion, members agreed that multiple wording changes may occur and no one wants to waste Town Counsel's review efforts if the wording changes as time goes by.

Michael Manugian will edit the submission review process document and have the Committee vote on it at the next meeting.

Michael Manugian will also share the categorization and he views it as important for the Committee to find a shared way to approach categorized submissions. Copies of categorized submissions will be printed out for Committee members in advance of the next meeting.

Next meeting: September 30, 2015 at 7 pm

Robert Collins moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:58 pm. Jane Allen seconded and the motion carried (6:0) (John Giger absent).

Notes by Fran Stanley