**CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**NOVEMBER 21, 2024**

**Present:** Peter Cunningham, Chair; Rebecca Weksner, Vice Chair; Mark Haddad, Clerk; Robert Collins; Kristen Frank; Michael Sulprizio

**Also Present:** Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk, Mary Jennings, Anna Eliot and Jack Petropoulos

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 4:48 p.m. Chair Cunningham presented the Agenda for the meeting.

Chair Cunningham announced that Member Brenden Mahoney had resigned. Since this is a School Committee appointment, the School Committee will be making an appointment to fill the vacancy.

**Continue Review of Current Recommended Amendments to the Charter**

Chair Cunningham stated that he would like to continue to review the proposals presented at the last meeting.

The first item was Recommendation #6 which would amend Section 5.3.1 by changing the title of “Principal Assistant Assessor” to “Principal Assessor” and Recommendation #7 which would amend Section 5.3.7 which would also change the title of “Principal Assistant Assessor” to “Principal Assessor”.

Mr. Haddad stated that he made this recommendation since both the Department of Revenue and State Law refer to the position as Principal Assessor. Mr. Collins agreed that it made sense to change it back. Dr. Weksner asked if it was a personality issue that caused the change in the first place. Mr. Collins said it was and agreed that it should be changed back.

The second item was the recommendation to abolish the Personnel Board. Mr. Haddad stated that the Personnel Board has not met since 2018. Mr. Sulprizio and Dr. Weksner asked if the current HR function covered these matters and if this was redundant. Mr. Haddad stated that it was covered by the current HR Director. Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Collins agreed that it was redundant and it made sense to eliminate the Personnel Board. Mary Jennings, a member of the audience stated that she used to be on the Personnel Board and agreed that the work was redundant and that is why there is only one member currently serving. Mr. Sulprizio stated that if volunteers do not feel a purpose in serving they will not volunteer.

The third and fourth items discussed were Recommendation #9, which would change the date to determine budgetary goals from October 31st to November 30th and Recommendation #10, which would amend Section 6.6 so that the Capital Improvement Plan is due on January 31st. Mr. Haddad stated that this was proposed to bring those two sections in line with the change last year that changed the budget due date to January 31st. The Committee agreed that this change made sense.

**Definition of “Town Officer” versus “Department Head”**

At the last meeting, Mr. Haddad asked the Committee to consider returning to the original definition of Town Officer. The previous Charter Review Committee broke out the definition so that there was one definition of Department Head and one definition of Appointed Official. The Committee had asked Mr. Collins to research the reason why this was changed since it eliminated Town Manager oversight of officials he appoints that are not a Department Head. Mr. Collins explained that this was done to make sure that the Town Manager could not direct appointed Boards and Committees. The Committee was attempting to highlight the distinction between officials whose duties were purely administrative and those who had discretionary authority. Mr. Haddad disagreed with this statement since appointed Boards such as the Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals cannot be directed or ordered by the Town Manager on how to do their job since their main roles were to enforce State Statutes.

Mr. Collins stated that he would like the opportunity to do further research and bring back a recommendation for Committee consideration. The Committee agreed to allow Mr. Collins to work on this and bring back a recommendation.

**Park Commission – Proposal to Change from Elected to Appointed**

Recommendation #1 was to change the Park Commission from elected to appointed. Mr. Cunningham opened the discussion and asked for input. Anna Eliot, who is currently a member of the Park Commission was concerned that the Park Commission has not had a chance to discuss this proposal and offer input. In addition, she felt that State Statute states that the Park Commission is elected and that the Charter cannot change that. Mr. Haddad stated that this is not correct and that the Charter can be amended to make the Commission appointed in the same manner the Town changed the Treasurer/Collector and Town Clerk positions from elected to appointed. Ms. Eliot also stated that elected officials are independent, while appointed Boards are under the influence of the appointing authority. Mr. Sulprizio disagreed with her statement and said that as a Member of the Finance Committee he does not feel beholden to the people that appoint him. Mr. Haddad also stated that he is on the Park Commission Meeting Agenda of December 10th to discuss this in more detail with the Park Commission.

Mary Jennings, also a member of the Park Commission, was not as concerned about elected versus appointed, but wanted to let the Charter Review Committee know that the Park Commission is working hard on dealing with the many issues and it was a new Commission, not the Commission of the past. In addition she would like the Committee to consider adding Recreation back to the title and duties of the Commission.

After a spirited debate, Chair Cunningham stated this is just the beginning of the conversation and the Charter Review Committee will continue to take input and discuss this further.

**December 5, 2024 Public Hearing**

The Committee believes the public hearing should be to take in testimony and not make decisions or debate particular proposals. It is a chance for the Public to weigh in on the Charter. Dr. Weksner believes the Public Hearing should be a listening session. Mr. Collins stated that the idea behind the first public hearing was to figure out how to take in information and how they would review the Charter.

**Public Comment**

Jack Petropoulos asked the Committee to consider using the various social media platforms to get the word out on the Charter review. He also stated that some of the decisions the Park Commission has to make can be difficult and should be left to elected officials. In addition, he wanted to make sure that the Committee understood that one of the issues with the Personnel Board was to make sure that non-union bylaw employees had access to an independent review of grievances.

**Minutes**

Mr. Haddad moved to approve the minutes from the November 7th Meeting. Dr. Weksner seconded. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes.

Being no further business, Chair Cunningham adjourned the meeting at 5:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Haddad, Clerk