



CHESTER CHARTER COMMISSION

DRAFT REPORT OF THE CHESTER CHARTER COMMISSION

To: Town Clerk, Town of Chester, Connecticut
Board of Selectmen, Town of Chester, Connecticut

From: Richard Strauss, Chairman, Chester Charter Commission

Date: February 14, 2024

The Chester Charter Commission ("Commission") was appointed by the Board of Selectmen in May of 2023 and held its first organizational meeting on May 31, 2023. The members of the Commission are Mark Borton, Brian Dailey, Lol Fearon, Jesse Gnazzo, Pat Holloway, Ian McLachlan and Richard Strauss, who was elected Chairman at the organizational meeting. The Commission conducted two public hearings on June 21, 2023 and January 31, 2024 to receive public comments.

Also, the Commission held 33 meetings including 18 charter drafting workshops and 2 preliminary draft charter briefings, all of which were open to the public. The Commission met with Town staff and members of boards and commissions. In addition, the Commission met with selectmen, town managers and town administrators from numerous towns having charters to hear of their experience. It also met with the executive directors of the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the River COG.

In its charge to the Charter Commission, the Board of Selectmen requested that the Commission consider the following topics:

- Increased complexity of Town government
- Continuity of leadership
- Diffused governance
- Difficulty in recruiting and maintaining professional staff and volunteers
- Low Town Meeting participation

At the initial public hearing, the comments centered around efficiency and keeping costs down as well as continuity and participation. At the meeting with the town's staff there was some sentiment for keeping the Town governance as it has always been. In light of the foregoing comments and our charge, the Commission considered whether a charter was necessary. We concluded that the changes which would modernize and make the Town government more responsive and efficient required the adoption of a charter as those objectives could not be accommodated in the current statutory scheme. The Commission concluded its preliminary draft charter deliberations on November 27, 2023 and was reviewed by the Town Attorney. The draft charter was then revised taking into consideration Attorney Robert's comments and additional comments from the public.

The Commission's 2nd public hearing was held on January 31, 2024. Approximately 75 attended (in-person and remotely), about 25 of whom spoke at the hearing. Additionally, written comments were received from several



people. Following the public hearing, at its meeting on February 8, 2024 the Commission discussed and considered revisions to the draft charter. The Commission's proposed draft charter revisions were then reviewed by the Town Attorney. Subsequently, the draft charter was finalized at the Commission's February 13, 2024 meeting.

The charter proposes the following changes to our government organization and procedures.

1. The legislative function of the Town would be shared, with the Town Meeting retaining the ultimate authority. The Board of Selectmen would have authority to adopt what are primarily administrative and regulatory ordinances.
2. As proposed, the Board of Selectmen would be expanded to five members serving four year terms.
3. A Town Administrator would be hired to assist the First Selectman who would remain the Chief Executive Officer of the Town.
4. The Board of Finance functions would be subsumed by an elected Financial Accountability Board, the enlarged Board of Selectmen and a Fiscal Advisory Committee. The Town Meeting would continue to be the final fiscal authority for approval of the annual Town budget and other major fiscal actions. Article 9: Finance and Taxation of the draft charter specifies the duties and responsibilities of these agencies regarding budgetary matters including the budget process, transfers and additional appropriations, and the Town's financial operations
5. The Town Administrator, Finance Director, and First Selectman would work with the Board of Selectmen, the Financial Accountability Board and the Fiscal Advisory Board, and agencies and departments to prepare a budget for the Town Meeting vote.
6. Several changes will be made for Town agencies including having members be appointed as compared with being elected; terms for members of agencies will be four years (except for Region 4 board members), and agencies would be limited to no more than seven (7) members with no alternates (except for the Zoning Board of Appeals).
7. The draft charter includes provisions in areas where no statutory directive exists such as rules of procedure to be followed at meetings and emergency policies to be followed.

The Commission voted at its February 13, 2024 meeting to submit the draft charter to the Board of Selectmen. A draft report, consisting of this memo and the draft charter, dated February 13, 2024 is hereby submitted to the Board of Selectmen via the Town Clerk.