



CHESTER CHARTER COMMISSION

**Meeting Minutes
June 20, 2023 at 6:30 pm**

Location: Chester Town Office Meeting Room, and via TEAMS

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM by Richard Strauss, Chair. In attendance included: Commission members; Richard Strauss, Lol Fearon, Jesse Gnazzo, Ian McLachlan, Pat Holloway, and Brian Dailey (via Teams), and not in attendance: Mark Borton; Commission Staff, Rebecca Mead.

Also in attendance were several Chester Board Chairs and members including: Lisa Wahle, Chair, Conservation Commission; John O'Hare, Chair, Board of Finance; John Chillock, Board of Finance; Carolyn Kane, Chair, Harbor Management Commission and Chair, Republican Town Committee (via Teams); Al Bisacky, Chair, Inland Wetlands Commission; Sandy Senior-Dauer, Chair, Library Board; Mike Sanders, Chair, Planning and Zoning Commission.

Chester Governance Study Committee Report

Richard provided an overview of the Governance Study Committee Report, (see attachment) opening with discussion of the charge to the committee by the Board of Selectmen, as well as the 3 major issues put forth by the Board of Selectmen (complexity of municipal government, continuity of leadership, and low public engagement). Discussion ensued on various points highlighted below.

An audience member asked about the permanence of a potential charter. Richard explained the defined charter revision process includes the need to form a Charter Revision Commission, and the holding of public hearings. It was also raised that a charter revision would open the entire charter for revision. Ian McLachlan cited that some towns have in their charters that there will be periodic reviews of their charter.

An audience member asked if it were possible to stagger Board of Selectmen terms without adopting a charter. Response was given that it is not possible to do so with a 3 member Board of Selectmen, and furthermore a charter is required to expand the number of selectmen in accordance with state statutes based on Chester's population being less than 10,000.

An audience member inquired as to the salaries for Board of Selectmen under a charter. Chairmen Strauss responded that typically towns with expanded board of selectmen do pay their selectmen. Furthermore, if a professional town manager were to be hired, salaries would likely depend on



delegated duties amongst the First Selectmen and professional manager (such as a town manager, town administrator, chief administrative officer).

An audience member inquired to the specific duties of a professional manager. Chairmen Strauss responded that there would likely be flexibility and delegation of responsibilities of the Board of Selectmen and a professional town manager or town administrator.

A question was raised regarding the requirement for minority representation under a charter form of government. Richard responded that whatever action is taken must be in compliance with state statutes.

The Charter Resolution

Richard then provided an overview of the Resolution adopted by the Board of Selectmen on April 12, 2023, including the formation of the charter commission, the charge from the BOS within the Charter Resolution, as well as the deliberate 2 year process which began with the BOS decision to create a Governance Study Committee and will continue through the completion of the work by the Charter Commission. Richard also shared the timeline and upcoming meetings. (See attachment)

Discussion

Ian McLachlan asked for board members / chairs to share any concerns or issues that they feel could help the Charter Commission in their work. Richard noted that after the June 21 public hearing, the Commission will be sending a survey to boards and commissions seeking input.

An audience member commented that Chester currently has a "systemic problem," specifically that there is no backup for staff anywhere in the building. Richard commented that the charter commission will likely be looking at the larger structural issues rather than a detailed management plan.

Carolyn Kane asked about parameters around recommendations for a skill set for BOS members. Discussion continued on the political process of electing Selectmen. Discussion continued regarding shared legislative authority amongst a BOS and the town meeting. Richard commented that currently we have a 3 member BOS and there are no qualifications listed for those positions. Carolyn Kane inquired regarding the job description for a town manager / administrator. Richard explained that a charter can define requirements for a potential professional manager.

Other

Rebecca Mead updated on communication activities, and discussed the "message" sent out through email June 15, and is hoping to have printed copies available at the town hall and at the library. Also in the works is a small poster which will contain a QR code to access updates. Goal is to inform but not overwhelm with bi-weekly updates. (See attachment)

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Richard stated that he called Valley Shore TV regarding broadcast of our meetings. There are required documents that will need to be signed, and we'll continue to look into this.

Richard asked for individual to do some analysis of the salary study of executive positions throughout CT towns. Jesse Gnazzo volunteered to take this on

Audience of Citizens

A member of audience advised that the commission should keep a close eye on the social media posts related to their work. Suggested there has on occasion been misinformation on social media.

An audience member asked if the bias of the committee is towards a charter. Richard responded that we have yet to begin substantive work. First goal is to come to consensus on the big issues put forth by the BOS. Ian added that the charge of the BOS is to draft a charter, but does not feel that we are obligated to draft a charter.

The audience member followed up asking for clarification regarding the Charter Commission's ability to decide that a charter is not the best course of action. Richard confirmed this.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:51 PM

A recording of this meeting is available online at: [Link to June 20 Charter Commission Meeting](#)

Respectfully Submitted by:

Brian Dailey, Secretary, Chester Charter Commission