



CHESTER CHARTER COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday June 21, 2023 Following the Initial Public Hearing
Location: Chester Town Hall Office Meeting Room, & via TEAMS

CALL TO ORDER

The June 21 meeting of the Chester Charter Commission was called to order at 9:08 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, and Attorney Richard Roberts. There was an Audience of Citizens of approximately 12.

APPROVAL OF JUNE 6 MINUTES

A motion was made by Lol to approve the June 6th minutes and seconded by Ian. There was no discussion, minutes were approved unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC HEARING PROCEEDINGS

Brian thanked Richard for chairing the public hearing. Jesse commented that while people want answers now, they will be discovered throughout the charter process. Lol stated that the commission will have the opportunity to discuss public engagement during the upcoming interviews with town administrators. He also stated that the enthusiasm of a competent town administrator may generate interest in local government. Lol continued that the commission cannot control the misreading of information by the public, or inaccuracies of what is reported on the commission. Lol stated that the commission must be clear, concise, and precise with what we say, and should communicate to the press on occasion if there are errors in what is reported about the commission or their work.

WORK PLAN AND TASK UPDATE

Chairmen Strauss briefly discussed the schedule, and the upcoming meeting with Chester Staff. Ian acknowledged the council of Attorney Roberts in regards to the inability to go into executive sessions, and noted that it would be helpful to have drafting sessions with committee members only. Lol raised a point regarding policy creation and implementation, noting that the town administrator implements while the BOS creates policy. Richard followed up with an example from education, stating that while the Board of education officially creates policy, it is often done so following proposal from school administrators. He continued that it is good practice to have



professionals give input in policy making. However, it is ultimately the elected officials that have the responsibility to adopting policy and ensuring that it is in compliance with statute. Lol noted that a town administrator would be the person that knew where to turn to solve issues. Brian commented that we would be putting a lot of faith into a town administrator, and that we would be looking for a town administrator that we can put a lot of faith into.

OTHER

The draft survey which will be sent to Chester Boards and Commissions was discussed. Pat suggested a question regarding missed grants or programs due to the small size of our government. Ian suggested that the town may consider hiring a grant writer. Ian also suggested an additional question for the survey asking if there are systemic issues within our government structure that could be changed to help each board / commission work more efficiently. Jesse noted that in Plainville, the finance director located grants. Pat offered to help review the Appendix of the Governance Study which lists board and commission information including elected/appointed, number of members and vacancies to insure we currently have an accurate record of this.

In reference to the discussion regarding minority representation in the previous meeting, a General Assembly, Office of Legislative Research (OLR) report was briefly discussed by Richard. (see attached)

Richard advised that we consult Attorney Roberts when drafting the charter itself as specific issues arise. Jesse noted that he will continue with his review of the salary information of first selectmen and professional managers (Town Managers, Town Administrators, and other relevant executive titles).

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

An audience member suggested we consult with the town clerk regarding the board and commission vacancy appendix in the Governance Study Report. The audience member stated while there have been some changes, there is also a lot of good information in the report. The audience member then reiterated how important it is for the commission to be crystal clear with the public,

An audience member commented on the inability to have executive session, and stated that public opinion is wary of that. Ian responded that it is undesirable to have misinformation spread to the public, and that discussion that takes place during drafting could lead to such. Audience member followed up that he agreed with Ian, but the statutes do not allow it.

An audience member on the phone stated that discussions such as the previous point have created concern amongst some residents, and stated that there is a reason why there are state statutes. Ian responded that the discussion that occurs during drafting sessions could be misinterpreted by the

Town of Chester
203 Middlesex Avenue
Chester Connecticut 06412



telephone: 860-526-0013
facsimile: 860-526-0004
web page: chesterct.org

public and lead to anxiety amongst the public. Ian stated that the commission does not want to create anxiety amongst the public.

The audience member on the phone brought up an error in a recent newspaper article which reported on the charter commission and charter process. She then stated that it is the responsibility of the all involved in town government to explain things to the public. Lol responded to the audience member that she was misrepresenting the mood and direction of the commission. He reiterated that the commission has sought legal council to ensure that all state statues are followed, and that the intent is to be transparent throughout this process.

The audience member on the phone then questioned the creation of the governance study committee, stating that it was done in an Economic Development Commission (EDC) meeting. Richard explained that the Governance Study Committee (GSC) was created in November and kept minutes as they are required to. The Audience member on the phone then stated that prior to the creation of the GSC, there was a committee that was being reported in the minutes of the economic development commission. Chairmen Strauss reiterated that the GSC was created in November, anything prior to that was not connected to the GSC.

The Audience member on the phone then questioned the process for appointing members of the GSC and the Charter Commission. Strauss stated that the BOS could have chosen candidates directly but chose to create a nominating committee which made recommendations to the BOS. The BOS chose to accept those nominations.

The audience member on the phone engaged in conversation with an audience member in the room. At this point Richard politely asked for that conversation to stop and stated that all questions will be directed to the Commission. The audience member on the phone stated that she was not accusing the commission or anyone else of anything. She then stated that she was echoing concerns that she has heard from her public sphere.

An audience member in the room cited the EDC meetings discussed before, explaining that there were two references to a governance study committee, but no policy or tactical discussion. The audience member stated that John Joslow - who at the time of the publishing of the EDC minutes was the chair EDC chair - was simply reporting to the EDC. The audience member stated that he and John Joslow were the two people that brought the idea of a GSC to the BOS.

Richard noted that we were going to time out of our TEAMS meeting in approximately 5 minutes, and asked for final comments or questions. Hearing none, the meeting was adjourned at 9:56 PM

A recording of this meeting is available online at: [Recording of Public Hearing](#)

- The meeting starts at 2:07 of the above recording (following public hearing)

Respectfully Submitted by:

Brian Dailey, Secretary, Chester Charter Commission