

NEWTON CHARTER COMMISSION
Wednesday, April 27, 2016
7:00 p.m. – City Hall – Room 211
MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chair Josh Krintzman, Vice Chair Rhanna Kidwell, Bryan Barash, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Karen Manning, Brooke Lipsitt, Chris Steele

The meeting was called to order at 7:00.

1. Approval of minutes: (March 30th, March 31st, April 6th, April 12th and April 13th)
Minutes approved. (9-0)
2. Public Comment:
 - Jeff Sacks, 45 Old Colony Rd., said that term limits bring new energy and new perspective to boards. He was term limited from a board and knowing that he had a certain amount of time on the board helped him to focus on what can be accomplished within the term limit.
 - Sally Lipshutz, 45 Radcliffe Rd., would like to see a City Council of 24 and retain ward councilors.
 - Tom Phillips, 14 Nobscot Rd., said that we have a well run city as it is and hopes the Commission will revisit the straw vote changing the size and composition of the City Council.
 - Rob Gifford, 62 Oxford Rd, said that he approved of the Commission's vote to downsize the Council and change the composition. He thinks that the ward Councilors are undemocratic because so few voters are represented by each Councilor. He hoped the Commission would consider term limits of 12 years for the City Council.
 - Lynn Weisberg, 5 Alden St., said that she agreed with the straw vote to downsize the City Council. She thinks staggered terms may not be necessary if the size of Council is reduced.

- Terri Sauro, 50 Cook St. disagreed with the change in the size of City Council. She does not believe that one Councilor per ward can do the work of three people.
- George Mansfield, 312 Lake Ave., thinks that removing the position of ward Councilor is a very bad idea.

3. Article 2: Term Lengths and Term Limits

The Commission had a discussion of term lengths. Rhanna presented four scenarios that outlined what the ballot/elections would look like under each one (see Article 2 Term Limits Scenarios), as well as several issues related to each scenario. After a lengthy discussion (audio portion: 0:44-1:23), Chris Steele suggested that the Commissioners take a poll to see if there was a consensus on a scenario. After the polling, Chris Steele made a motion to adopt Scenario 1: 2-year terms for all Councilors. (Lipsitt second). Motion approved, 7-2 (No: Kidwell, Haywood)

Josh Krintzman introduced the term limits discussion. He suggested that Commissioners each express opinions on the concept of term limits for the City Council.

- Chris Steele said he was conflicted about term limits. He believes that elections should establish a Councilor's term limit.
- Anne Larner would like to have 12-year term limits for the City Council. Twelve years allows Councilors to take on leadership roles and make a significant contribution.
- Howard Haywood agreed that 12-year term limits allows Councilors to accomplish a great deal and then become city leaders after leaving the Council.
- Rhanna Kidwell said that turnover outweighs protecting the few Councilors who choose to remain for a very long time. She favored 12 to 14-year term limits.
- Bryan Barash said he does not like term limits but sees the entrenchment of the Council at the city level. He leaned toward a term limit that allows Councilors enough time to learn how the city works and gain some institutional knowledge so he favored 12, 14, or 16-year term limits.

- Karen Manning expressed concern about the power of incumbency and thought term limits would encourage new people to run for office. She favored 12-year term limits.
- Jane Frantz favored a 12-year term limit because it is enough time for a Councilor to be effective and productive members of the Council.
- Josh Krintzman was persuaded that term limits are good at the city level. The issues before the City Council may take longer to deal with than those before the School Committee, so he sees reasons why the term limits for the Council may be longer than those for the School Committee.
- Brooke Lipsitt does not support term limits. She thought that term limits provides an arbitrary number

Jane Frantz made a motion that the City Councilors have 12-year term limits (Larner second). The Commission discussed specific details related to how the term limits for Council would work. Anne Larner shared statistics about the turnover on the Council since 1951. Motion approved, 7-2 (No: Lipsitt and Steele)

Rhanna raised the issue of whether the comptroller should report to the Council or the Mayor and whether the Council should have access to independent legal counsel. Brooke said that the Council and the School Committee should have ad hoc counsel to address particular issues.

The Commission discussed whether the city should provide health benefits for elected officials. Rhanna questioned whether it was better to have a compensation package that is of equal value to all Councilors. The Commission decided to look into the issue in greater depth and review the issue at a future meeting.

Public Comment:

- Ted Hess-Mahan, 871 Watertown St. expressed his opposition to term limits.
- Shawn Fitzgibbons, 300 Homer St., said he supports the decision to downsize the Council and expressed concern about term limits.
- Andrea Kelley, 28 Putnam St. said she always believed the at-large Councilors represented the community well.

- Kathleen Hobson, 28 Dorset Rd., originally supported 4-year terms but sees the value in the 2-year term for City Councilors.
- Rena Getz, 192 Pine Ridge Rd., expressed support for the present structure of the City Council and opposition to term limits. She said that ward representation is critical.
- Susan R. from Newton Highlands supports maintaining the size and composition of the City Council.
- Earnest Lowenstein, 57 Hyde St., said that the Commission's discussion was engaging even though he disagreed with the decisions.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40.

Documentation:

1. Article 2 Term Length Scenarios
2. Article 2 Discussion Preview
3. Staggered Terms Transition Description - Collins Center