

Public Hearing Meeting Minutes

Articles 2, 3, 4

June 1, 2016

Opening Remarks and Introduction of Commissioners by Chairman Josh Krintzman.
Commissioners Howard Haywood and Brooke Lipsitt not present.

Highlights from the Public Comment:

Councilor Marc Laredo, 31 Fillmore Rd. (Councilor-at-Large, Ward 7).

As far as composition, thinks City Council functions well, however appreciates argument for smaller council. He thinks 1 at-large councilor per ward is a wise choice and is concerned with electing 5 at-large. Each voter is still voting for 13 individuals, not much fewer than 17. Thinks one-on-one contests are important, and Commission's [proposed] system makes it worse. He recommends electing 16 councilors at-large, with 4 year staggered terms, with 8 people up or down each election.

Another possible scenario is 8 at-large and 4 district councilors, which would be simpler for voters. The Commission's [currently proposed] system encourages slates, discourages people from running, and reduces accountability. Cautions that people who are not strong can come in 5th during an election and keep serving.

Councilor Ruthanne Fuller, 163 Suffolk Road.

Agrees with 100% of what Marc Laredo said and wants to expand on a few points. She was interested in Sunday's Boston Globe article [Krintzman vs. Yates debate size of City Council].

Among her goals are effectiveness, responsibility, efficiency, with efficiency at bottom. Re: Commission's Article 2 straw votes, she is comfortable with reducing the size. If there is a complex or divisive issue, it is hard to bring 24 councilors up to speed. "Turning the ship" can be difficult with 24. The flip side is that fewer than 24 is less representation, fewer people for 86,000 people to turn to~ there are tradeoffs. She is comfortable switching from ward only to ward councilors at-large. She is an at-large councilor and is aware of ward issues but is always looking city wide.

5 elected at-large [anywhere in city] means voters cannot vote down a particular person. She also thinks that there could be geographic clustering which could be very damaging. Staggered elections and scenario of 8 at-large plus 4 district [also described by Marc Laredo] is worth considering.

She is against [Commission's currently proposed] 12 year term limits, and thinks this would mean removing really good leaders. We don't need to worry about corruption here in Newton. This is removing power from voters - term limits are achieved through elections. Re: increasing contested elections~ explain the problem. Stick with ward councilors. If there is a concern about "fresh blood", how is this helped by reducing the Council to 13? If it is too hard to run - then you really don't want all at-large. It is easier to run for ward only. Questions whether [proposed changes] create more accountability~ thinks accountability is decreased. People will just serve out their 12 years. Advises that the Commission figures out what it is trying to accomplish and suggests increasing the number of years if deciding to stick with term limits.

Sallee Lipshutz 24 Radcliffe Rd., Waban

Reads statement from Marjorie Arons-Barron of Edgefield Rd. Waban. She wrote for the "Newton Times" in the 70's has been actively engaged in city politics since high school and has a blog. Her note to the Commission: "Keep your hands off our ward councilors". She describes Newton from the past in the 50's. Cites more diversity now and municipal programs helping with important issues. She acknowledges that 24 councilors is cumbersome and recommends 8 ward councilors and 5 elected at-large to all for neighborhood responsiveness. Ward councilors

know pulse of wards and the fiber of neighborhoods.

Shawn Fitzgibbons, 300 Homer St.

Likes the Commission's process and the opportunity to comment and responsiveness. He wants to put forward the idea about broad principles, enshrining rights and protections, i.e. for workers to organize, transgender, the environment, within the charter. These topics are discussed at national and state level, and certain rights are afforded to people who live here.

Supports reducing the size of council. Voting was cumbersome especially [this past election] with the Charter Commission. Likes idea of city-focused elected body. All at-large officials does not cause him concern and he is not worried about not having ward councilors. Thinks someone elected city-wide would bring more to bear. He was nervous about term limits, but understands and wants excellent officials to be able to do good work.

Ernest Loewenstein, 57 Hyde Street.

Opposes straw vote of composition of council. Cites Josh Krintzman's Globe article arguments for a smaller council and thinks they do not stand up to critical review. Feels that ward councilors are different than those elected at-large. What does the straw vote mean? Will there be another vote on this question? He would like an answer.

Elaine Arruda, 1921 Commonwealth Ave., Auburndale

Strongly opposes the Commission's proposed changes, especially loss of ward councilors. Cites of analogy of senators being elected by the whole country, and makes the point that it is more expensive for at-large councilors to run. Would we want to live in a country with 46 senators from New York? This does not seem democratic to her. Worcester official testified [at Round Table] that removing the ward councilors resulted in loss of representation.

Al Calderone, 605 Pearl Street

Cites opposition to extending School Committee term limits to 12 years. As a parent, teacher (within NPS), and resident, he thinks that the body should mostly be led by people with children still in the schools. He thinks the investment in the culture and schools is important. Please keep the School Committee term limits at 8 years.

Councilor Amy Sangiolo, 389 Central Street

She does not want to comment on findings, but shares concern about how Commission has arrived at its decisions. She wants to know what kind of research the Commission has used, communications its members have had with people in the city, about the Commission's email, etc. She doesn't know who we have heard from or what kinds of comments are being submitted. She is interested in how the Commission has arrived at the proposal to reduce the size of the board, the manner of reducing, and reasoning behind term limits. She thanks Councilor Fuller and Councilor Laredo for their comments.

Priscilla Leith, 162 Islington Rd., Auburndale

Her comments [mostly] pertain to proposed revisions to legislative, after reviewing email from Amy Sangiolo outlining Commission's proposed changes.

Article 2: She thinks the number of councilors should remain at 24, with 8 as councilors-by-ward and sixteen councilors-at-large. They should be elected every 2 years using staggered elections. She agrees with the Commission's proposed residency specification (July 1) and term limits of 12 consecutive years.

Article 3: Cites concern over department heads departing under "mysterious circumstances" and suggests adding "The mayor shall have the power to appoint department heads. She/he shall also have the power to fire any department head, but the City Council shall have the right to call for an Executive Session to inquire into the reasons and causes for her/his dismissal within 30 days."

Other: Not a lot of people are attending the Commission meetings and she believes the news coverage is spotty.

Commission should pay attention to TAB editorial in support of ward councilors, and provides examples of their value. She recommends revisiting our decisions to date. Efficiency is not as important as having councilors represent Newton's diversity. Haggling within the Council "works well".

Nathaniel Lichten, 53 Pinecrest Road:

Agrees with almost decisions to date. There are two things to address and the first is the size of the Board. He thinks 13 is too small, though 24 are not needed. He feels there should be 2 councilors per ward, in case there is a personality difference or difference in interests. He also disagrees about 12 year term limits and is more comfortable with 16 years because of "ramp up time". There is benefit to keeping people around for extended period of time, but not indefinitely as it is now. He was pleased with the Commission's School Committee deliberations.