

NEWTON CHARTER COMMISSION
Wednesday, June 29, 2016
7:00 p.m. – City Hall – Room 222
MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chair Josh Krintzman, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Karen Manning, Brooke Lipsitt

Absent: Bryan Barash, Rhanna Kidwell, Chris Steele

Josh Krintzman called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Approval of Minutes: April 27th

Larner made a motion to approve; Lipsitt seconded. (6-0; Barash, Kidwell Steele absent)

Public Comment:

Kathleen Hobson, 128 Dorset Rd, expressed support for the Commission's straw vote on the size and composition of the City Council. She mentioned that Everett recently made similar changes and they are pleased with the result.

Phil Herr, 20 Marlboro St., will compare the Mayor's housing package and the Comprehensive Plan to check for similarities and inconsistencies to see how the city can make the best use of the package and the Commission's work on Article 7.

Lois Levin, 497 Chestnut St., said she supported the proposals the Commission has made thus far and urged the group to continue with its efforts.

Earnest Loewenstein, 57 Hyde St., does not think there's a reason to cut the size of the Council. He urged the Commission to retain the 24-member Council, but have the elections be one-on-one, rather than electing the top two candidates.

Bryan Barash arrived (7:15)

Article 7: Planning

The Commission reviewed this Article to verify that the decisions and language reflect the intent of the deliberations at the June 15th meeting. Karen Manning began by recapping the review process.

In Section 7-2b, Commissioners expressed concern that the word "minor" to describe modifications the Mayor may make to the Comprehensive Plan was not clearly defined. After a discussion, Lipsitt made a motion to remove the word "minor"; Larner seconded. (7-0; Kidwell, Steele absent)

Barash made a motion to approve the Article 7 draft, Lipsitt seconded. (7-0; Kidwell, Steele absent)

Article 5: Financial Procedures

The purpose of this discussion was also to review language and proposed changes to the Article.

In Section 5.4a, the Commission decided to include the more specific language in the description of the capital improvement plan, including the rationale for decisions the city makes in regard to the CIP. The Commission will take a straw vote on Article 5 at the July 12th meeting.

Article 11: Design Review Committee

Anne Larner introduced the discussion about the Design Review Committee with a description of issues that are a result of an increase in building projects and changes in the design review process:

- Capacity: It is difficult to find a sufficient number of professionals who are able to serve on a committee that does not have a set meeting schedule.
- Change in review process: the MSBA currently determines the school building process and this has had an impact on the design review process.
- The DRC meets with a school building committee and this has also had an impact on how it operates.
- The 1971 charter states that every project requiring an architect must be part of the design review process. This may no longer be a realistic expectation because the number of projects is beyond the capacity of the committee.
- A review of the ordinances could provide the DRC with the flexibility to deal with these issues.

Anne suggested that a revised charter could include a statement requiring a periodic review of the ordinances to make the DRC consistent with current law and as effective as possible. Commissioners acknowledged that problems exist with the DRC, but questioned whether the charter is the appropriate place to deal with them. Lipsitt made a motion to remove Section 11-8 from the charter, Haywood seconded. After a discussion, Lipsitt withdrew the motion.

Anne said that the DRC provided for public oversight, influence, and vetting of major projects that could prevent pressure on mayors to make compromises on building projects. She also noted that a public independent review was beneficial to the citizenry. Josh suggested that the Commission review the DRC at a later date when there is more clarity about how the Commission should deal with this section. (audio: 1:07-1:47)

City Council Compensation

Bryan led the discussion on City Council compensation. He noted that Newton's compensation for city officials is not competitive with that of other communities. The Commission discussed whether the salary should be included in the charter or as a recommendation in the final report. Bryan will develop language recommending an increase in salary in the report.

Summer Work

The Commission will continue to work on the following items this summer:

- The Commission will develop a plan to explain the review process and proposed revisions to the public.
- Leaders will tie up loose ends of the articles that have been reviewed.
- Deliberation of term limits for the city council, school committee, and mayor will take place on July 12.
- Howard suggested that the entire Commission work on Article 9 since there are no other examples of area councils in the state.
- The Commission will compile a list of items that do not belong in the charter but are of interest to the community.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20.

Documentation:

- [Article 7: Planning](#)
- [Article 5 Annotated Final](#)
- [Design Review and Designer Selection Committees, Article 11, Section 8](#)
- [Comparative Salaries Across Cities CC and SC](#)