

NEWTON CHARTER COMMISSION
Thursday, December 17, 2015
7:00 p.m. – Aldermanic Chambers
Public Hearing

Josh Krintzman called the hearing to order and introduced the Commissioners in attendance: Vice Chair Rhanna Kidwell, Bryan Barash, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Brooke Lipsitt, Karen Manning, Chris Steele. He then explained the process of establishing a Charter Commission and the legal requirements of the Commission. He noted there would be additional public hearings beyond what is required by law.

Josh outlined the format for the evening: each attendee who wished to share remarks would have 3 minutes to speak. At the end of the public hearing, Commissioners would have an opportunity to speak. He then opened the hearing up to public comment.

John Stewart described his experiences as an active member of the community. He made multiple points, including:

- The Commission should think boldly.
- Fix the glitches in local government where structural changes could make for a well-run city.
- The change in one part of the government will affect the workings of other parts of the government.
- Look broadly for solutions beyond local communities. Cities in other parts of the country may have useful innovative ideas.

Bill Renke, 142 Cornell St., spoke about Article 10 (Free Petitions). He encouraged the Commission to address the need to include the use of the most current technology available to disseminate information to residents. He encouraged the Commission to address technology in all articles. He said that a number of restrictions have been put into place and residents are not aware of them until they are enacted. To the extent possible, he believes that the charter should be structured so that these items can be dealt with at the next municipal election.

Marian Knapp, 252 Hammond Pond Parkway, spoke about multiple issues including:

- The city needs a vision statement that states what kind of city we want to be.
- The city needs a better way to deal with the tensions that arise between local villages and larger community over their respective needs.
- Council meetings often focused on minutia.
- The City Council and the Mayor need improved communication.
- The City has many staff and commission positions that have been left vacant for long periods of time. This situation needs to be addressed.

Sue Flicop, 145 Florence St., spoke on behalf of the League of Women Voters and asked that the Commission to consider changes that may address:

- Whether there is a need for 24 City Council members.
- The special permitting process. Who should be responsible for approval of special permits?
- The election cycle.
- The possibility of requiring the Council president be a Councilor-at-large.

Doris Ann Sweet, 281 Lexington St., Auburndale, is grateful for the LWVN initiative and seconds John Stewart's comments about the need to think boldly and research widely in considering changes to our government.

Ald. Brian Yates, 1094 Chestnut St., urged the Commission to address the following:

- Area Councils should be able to use CPA funds.
- Include recall language in the Charter.
- Maintain a high standard of proof for recommending a change in the form of government.
- Maintain the size of the Council but stagger four year terms. Staggered four year terms for Councilors-at-large would enable voters to target their dissatisfaction with specific Councilors. This would also allow Councilors with terms opposite of the mayoral terms to run for mayor without sacrificing their seats.

Charlie Shapiro complimented the Commission on a strong beginning. He spoke about the following issues:

- Focus one or two meetings on broader topics (balance of power, how bodies work together) to improve internal communication.
- He emphasized the importance of ward aldermen. They are most closely connected to the residents and understand their needs best.
- Look internally for improvements because there's a lot that Newton does well.

Sallee Lipshutz, 24 Radcliffe Rd., expressed an appreciation for the website. She spoke about the following issues:

- Small changes can make a large difference. Changing the form of government to a city manager will limit the ability of the city to benefit from a mayor who is able to represent the city at a national level or interact with people at the state and national levels of government.
- If the size of the City Council is reduced, the Council will need to take on additional responsibility for constituent services.
- The Commission needs to listen to public input and consider the words of every resident who shares ideas.

Priscilla Leith, 162 Islington Rd., stated that she did not think that a charter revision was necessary. The best government is suited to the demographics of the community. She supports the present form of government with a strong mayoral government and 24 aldermen. The larger Council allows more people to be able to afford to run for office. Maintain Land Use Committee.

Don Ross, 211 Winslow Rd., would like to see the Commission maintain the size of the Council. He thinks it is important to maintain the ward alderman position. With more seats available on the Council, more people can be involved in city government and civic affairs.

Lisle Baker, 137 Suffolk Rd., encouraged the Commission to maintain the ward alderman position. The BOA has been a democratic body with a diverse composition. The role of the President enables the BOA to do its job. Everyone on the Board has a role and something to add. Newton's Charter is an organic document that can be amended. There have been a number of home rule petitions. The Commission does not have to solve all problems. The BOA resets rules when necessary. The Charter is only one part of the process.

Terry Sack, 64 Dorcar Rd., said that as a realtor, he has clients who need to deal with zoning issues. When there is a zoning issue, the full Board micromanages smaller issues that could be dealt with by another Board. The City Council should deal with larger land use issues, but residential issues should be dealt with in a more efficient manner by another board.

Sue Flicop spoke on her own behalf and addressed the issue of aldermanic outreach. She said that many people don't know their alderman or how many aldermen serve in Newton. She noted that there were four contested aldermanic seats in the most recent election and that in order to defeat an incumbent, the candidate required significant funding.

Josh stated that the Commission would hold other public hearings in the future and residents would have an opportunity to speak at Charter Commission working meetings.

Chris Steele thanked the public for attending the public hearing. He explained that the Commission has no clerical assistance but is committed to transparency.

Bryan Barash is looking forward to a thoughtful and creative review process.

Karen Manning explained how to get to the Charter Commission website. She encouraged people to sign up to receive emails.

Ernest Lowenstein was not able to easily locate the Charter Commission web page.

Josh Krintzman adjourned the public hearing at 8:15p.m.