

MINUTES - Amesbury Charter Review Commission (ACRC)

Wednesday, June 3, 2020, 7:00pm, Virtual Meeting (via GTM and ACTV)

COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Chamberlain
Kate Currie
Peter Frey
Bonnijo Kitchin
Christian Scorzoni
Jonathan Sherwood
Nick Wheeler

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Christine Dixon, City Clerk
Paul Fahey, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor (Staff Liaison)

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL; SWEARING-IN OF COMMISSIONERS Christine Dixon called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm. All Commissioners were present. She administered the Oath of Office to all commissioners.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND OTHER OFFICERS Christine Dixon opened nominations for Commission Chair. Christian Scorzoni nominated Nick Wheeler for Chair, seconded by Bonnijo Kitchin. Unanimous vote. Christine Dixon left the meeting after the Chair election.

Chair Nick Wheeler called for nominations for Commission Secretary. Christian Scorzoni nominated Peter Frey, seconded by Jonathan Sherwood. Unanimous vote.

After a brief discussion about the position, Chair Nick Wheeler called for nominations for Commission Vice Chair. Rob Chamberlain nominated Jonathan Sherwood, seconded by Christian Scorzoni. Unanimous vote.

DISCUSSION OF COMMISSION ACTIVITIES Chair Nick Wheeler recognized Paul Fahey, who was appointed by Mayor Gove to serve as staff liaison for the Commission. He thanked the Commission on behalf of Mayor Gove, and stated that she is in strong support of the Charter review efforts they are undertaking. He will attend all meetings and take notes for the minutes, which will be submitted for Commission approval by the Commission Secretary. He outlined the support which will be provided by the Collins Center at UMass Boston; they are preparing a technical review memo for the Commission to use, and they are available to attend three (3) Commission meetings as part of the initial engagement.

Jonathan Sherwood asked Paul Fahey what direction if any the Mayor wishes to give the Commission. He responded that the Mayor wants to be supportive and will provide her thoughts when such opportunities arise. He noted that the Mayor did not want to be seen as attempting to dictate to the Commission or to unduly influence their deliberations.

Chair Nick Wheeler asked about the proposed timeline for the Commission's work. Paul Fahey responded that the process requires the Commission to report to the City Council, which will then provide input. The Mayor and City Council would then file a Home Rule Petition with the Legislature, hopefully by January 2021, with the goal of having the Legislature and Governor approve the petition by mid-2021 so that it can be placed on the November 2021 municipal election ballot for voter approval.

Christian Scorzoni asked about whether Chair Nick Wheeler is representing the City Council on the Commission. Wheeler responded that the Mayor had appointed him but not as a Council representative, as she also appointed Kate Currie but not as a School Committee representative.

Christian Scorzoni also asked about the value of receiving input from city departments and boards/commissions, and whether the Commission wanted to review "unfinished business" from previous efforts. Fahey proposed that the Commission consider soliciting input from boards and commissions, and that he could make the same ask of department heads on behalf of the Commission.

Christian Scorzoni further asked whether the scope of the Commission's work would or should include comparing items in the Charter to City ordinances and Council rules, in order to seek clarification and resolve differences. He also questioned whether the Collins Center could be helpful with this process. Paul Fahey responded that this level of analysis may be beyond the current engagement with the Collins Center, but that he would explore further with them.

Chair Nick Wheeler agreed with the concern about varying interpretations of some terms in the Charter and other City ordinances and Council rules, citing the specific example of "measures".

Rob Chamberlain asked if the Collins Center might have information on "model charters" for the Commission to utilize in its deliberations.

Chair Nick Wheeler asked when the Commission will receive the review memo from the Collins Center. Paul Fahey responded that the Mayor had just signed the engagement letter with the Collins Center today, after reducing their commitment somewhat given budget restraints and delays due to COVID-19. He expects that the memo will be sent to the Commission soon, hopefully before the next meeting.

It was agreed that the Commission will seek to provide its report to the Council by November 2020 and will meet twice a month from June-October 2020. There will also be some structured public input into the Commission meetings. There is a page for the Commission on the City website to share information.

Jonathan Sherwood suggested framing some initial discussion questions to identify perceived problems with the Charter as a starting point, and gave examples such as "What may be broken?" He felt this may be a better approach than simply reviewing the Charter line-by-line.

Rob Chamberlain asked whether it would be possible to get information about how often KP Law (City Solicitor) has had to address Charter issues in recent years. Paul Fahey responded that it's possible to do so, but that there may be a cost associated. He will explore whether we can review previous invoices to see where such questions may have been already researched in the past. Christian Scorzoni asked whether the City Clerk could review previous Council minutes to look for similar references to the Charter. Fahey responded that the Mayor's Office may have an intern this summer that could help.

SET MEETING SCHEDULE After a lengthy discussion about Commission members' availability and the City meeting calendar, the Commission decided to meet on the 2nd Wednesday and 4th Thursday of each month. Peter Frey moved to set the schedule, Jonathan Sherwood seconded, unanimous vote.

OTHER BUSINESS Paul Fahey told the Commission that he can bring any initial questions, beyond the ones discussed tonight, to the Collins Center for their review.

Christian Scorzoni asked if the Collins Center could explore the specific question of conflicts between the Charter and the Council rules and procedures.

PUBLIC COMMENT Paul Fahey informed the Commission that, as a virtual meeting, public comment can be submitted by e-mail or on the Amesbury Community Television Facebook page. The only public comment was from Councilor Stanganelli via Facebook: "Good luck and congrats for starting".

NEXT MEETING DATE Thursday, June 25th at 7pm via GoToMeeting.

ADJOURNMENT Motion to adjourn by Bonnijo Kitchin, seconded by Christian Scorzoni. Unanimous vote. Meeting adjourned at 8:05pm.

Minutes prepared by Paul Fahey, Staff Liaison



Respectfully submitted by Peter Frey, Secretary, Amesbury Charter Review Commission