



Charter Chat #2 Questions

11/22/20

These are questions posed in the chat during the first Charter Chat meeting held on November 22, 2020, which can be viewed on YouTube [here](#). Some of them require more research while others have been answered. We've bundled them into questions regarding the Charter Review Commission, what the review process involves, and Town Council – Town Manager Governance. This does not include questions answered during the meeting!

Charter Review Commission Considerations

1. Does the CRC have a strategic plan for outreach? Who is responsible for outreach?

The CRC has not developed a strategic plan for outreach, though it has formed an Outreach Committee.

2. DIVERSITY. There is a desire to understand the commission's plan to address this issue. How can we ensure a more representative committee is assembled in future? This extends to all boards, committees, officials and volunteer arms like WF. Is there a plan to establish a diversity, equity, & inclusion committee? Many patrons feel this is necessary and long overdue.

The makeup of future Charter Committees can be specifically addressed during the current Charter Review Process. Specific suggestions about diversity can be included. There can be language in the charter that requires more equity and inclusion on the existing and future boards, commissions and committees.

3. What is the method for choosing CRC members and where would this be publicized for future reviews? Can the selection process be addressed in the charter? Where were the CRC ads posted besides the town website for this review cycle?

Six residents are chosen by an application and interview process decided by the Town Council President and all Town Councilors sit on the Charter Review Commission. The charter refers to this selection process in Section 8-1 but has no direction on how nominations are elicited, qualification of candidates, interview process, how many residents or town councilors are allowed etc. There is not much effort made to reach residents who aren't already aware of the CRC review process or to find a diverse set of community members. These aspects can all be changed in the Charter Review process.

4. Why aren't the CRC Meeting minutes posted in a more timely fashion?

The person responsible for taking minutes is dealing with family concerns but should be at the CRC's next meeting. She will also have to catch-up with minutes for the first three meetings.

Charter Logistics/ Collins Center

5. What is the best way to request ongoing research and information on the review process from Collins Center and elsewhere?

This has been suggested that questions for the Collins Center should go through the Town Council's clerk Marilyn Pronovost at mpronovost@watertown-ma.gov. The Charter Review Commission Website also includes agendas with links to Collins Center information ([Link to Site](#)).

6. Can we ask the Collins Center to help us with how other towns are involved in budget decisions?

I believe this is possible.

7. What is the value of modeling after other towns when we haven't yet established what is working/not working in our own town?

This is a very important question that has been repeated by others. The question is on to determine what is or is not working. The CRC could recommend a survey.

8. What value has the Collins Center brought to the process so far?

The Collins Center has helped frame the work of the Charter Review Commission and provided many examples of other city and town charters ([Link to Collins Center Document](#)).

9. Is ranked choice voting charter eligible?

I am not sure. The State does regulate how elections are held, but Cambridge has a ranked choice voting system, and [Northampton recently adopted it in their own charter](#). I think Watertown could have the same, but it may have to be through a home rule petition and require the support of the State House and Senate and the Governor. More research is needed to answer this question.

10. Are there any state requirements about the charter review process?

There are significant state requirements about how a charter can be changed by either a Charter review commission or a Charter Review Committee. There are three different avenues available.

11. Why is this Charter Review timeline so rushed if the CRC has autonomy to extend?

The Charter Review Commission has voted to extend the timeline for another year. The present charter does say “the said committee shall file a report within the said year recommending any changes to the charter which it may deem to be necessary or desirable, unless an extension is authorized by vote of the town council.”

12. Can a preamble be added to the charter that outlines the town’s values/beliefs?

Yes.

13. Were there any notable changes to the Charter during the past two review processes in 2000 and 1990?

It would be difficult to review the changes approved by the votes during the CR process in 1990, 2000, and 2010, however this is a good chore for the Education Committee.

14. Are there other avenues for making changes to the charter besides the official charter review process?

Yes, in short the Charter can be changed at any time, though what can be changed and how long it will take to make the change are two of the many variables that must be considered.

Town Council – Town Manager Governance

15. How is the town president elected? Where is the position posted? There is interest in seeing this position campaigning and engaging in the community vs. relying on “who shows up.”

The Town Council President is elected by the voters. The term is the same as that of other councilors - 2 years.

16. What are the roles and responsibilities of the council president? Is this in the charter? How does this compare to the town manager? There is a lot of feedback about the lack of accountability and transparency within these roles.

The “Power and Duties” of the TC president are in “Section 2-2 Council President” of the Charter. However, there is not a lot of detail in the Charter, for example, the President decides what councilors sit on what TC committees. Also, the TC president sits on the School Committee with the full rights and responsibilities as other members.

17. What provisions might the charter include that ensure effective evaluation and supervision of the town manager (that might improve accountability of the town’s management)?

The “Powers and Duties” of the Town Manager are detailed in Section 3-2 Powers and Duties”. There are 14 specific powers and duties given to the Town Manager. A comparison of the TC

President's powers and duties to those of the Town Manager is instructive. Watertown has a strong Town Manager vis-a-vis the Town Council. There are no term limits for the Town Manager.

18. How are we addressing the transparency issues in both the Charter Review Process AND town governance?

This is a difficult question to answer. All Town Council meetings, other than when the TC is meeting in Executive Session, are open to the public and need to be advertised with the proposed agenda at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. This is also true for any of the TC's committee meetings. Also, the TC meetings are broadcasted live on WCATV. This is also true for the proceedings of the Charter Review Committee. There are no specific requirements pertaining to transparency of the Town Manager's activities.

19. What is the structure of the Town Council? Numbers, district vs. at large, terms, compensation, committee structure, etc.?

Some of this is detailed in the Charter in Sections 2-1, 2-3 and 2-4. The TC is composed for nine individuals, 4 District Councilors and 4 At-Large Councilors with the President serving also as an At-Large Councilor. Their terms are two years. The compensation is \$7,500 per year. Presently there are 11 committees with three councilors on each committee, including a chair, vice-chair and secretary. There are no term limits for Town Councilors.

20. What is the best form of government for Watertown? Mayoral vs Town Manager? Which should be elected vs. appointed? Should citizens have more say about the Town Manager role, Planning Depts, Public Works, etc.?

There are varying opinions about these questions. It has been brought up that issues concerning accountability could be solved without having to change the form of government.

21. How can we improve the mechanism of community feedback and accountability between the Police Dept and the town?

There is no existing mechanism for feedback and accountability. The Chief of Police is hired and supervised by the Town Manager and is not obligated to interact with residents. The Town Council can request the presence of the Chief or his staff at Town Council committee meetings.

22. How can we make the tax dollar allocation be more representative of our voters' priorities? Can there be more budget transparency in general?

A detailed explanation of the budget process that begins with the submission of a preliminary budget in October and ends with a vote of the Town Council in June is not possible here. Suffice to say there are opportunities throughout the process of resident input though the degree to which this input affects the final outcome of the budget is not clear.

23. Is the new CIO being urged to do his own outreach? He is new to Watertown and has no context on us.

The CIO is supervised by the Town Manager and has a detailed job description. It can be assumed that he will reach out to individuals and organizations to learn more about the community.

24. Where is the hierarchy chart (outlining Watertown's government structure) from town hall?

There is a chart that is little out of date. A new one is being prepared at the request of the Charter Review Committee.

25. When is the election cycle for the town?

Every two years on the odd years. Our next Town election will be in November 2021.

