

CHARTER CHAT NOTES

12/20/20

3:00pm-4:15pm (75 mins)

Facilitator: Larry R.

Host: Emily D.

Note-Taker/Live Q & A monitor: Janis H.

Debrief Note-Taker: Nancy H.

CRC Facilitator: Tony P.

This week's Charter Chat (CC) consisted of 24 people at max, and began with introductions/meeting guidelines followed by a brief summary of the most recent CRC meeting by Councilor Tony Palumbo. The floor was opened for questions/comments after Tony's summary, most of which were addressed live.

(Q=Question C=Comment)

CRC SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Q1: Who should we go to with specific questions about and for the Collins Center?

Q2: Who will be presenting at the CRC meeting in January?

Q3: How are we ensuring access to Marcy's CRC meeting re-caps to the public if they are not aware of Watertown Forward (WF)? These re-caps have gotten rave reviews and have been helpful in supporting the process.

Q4: How do we measure success in our city?

Q5: Which council members are on the CRC Committee and how are the non-council members chosen?

Q6: How many attendees were at the last CRC meeting?

Q7: What cities are giving presentations at the next CRC meeting? There is concern that the presenting towns will not compare to Watertown's unique numbers and demographics.

C1: There is growing concern with how certain CRC committee members are responding/presenting information during the CRC meetings.

C2: Many participants appreciate the council's CRC recap at the top of the Charter Chats and hope this will be ongoing.

C3: There is ongoing feedback that the non-council selection process for the CRC Committee needs to be more open/accessible/equitable in future.

C4: With over 34k residents of Watertown, the amount of attendees at the CRC meetings is not a healthy representation. We should continue to strive for better.

POLL / VALUES & GOOD GOVERNMENT

This portion of the CC was meant to start a conversation around values/vision in good government. It accounted for the bulk of the meeting, and flushed out some good conversations. Attendees were polled on which 3-4 core values (of 6) they believe ***should be strengthened*** in the Charter. (*results below; top 3 in gray*) Based on poll results, attendees were offered an opportunity to speak from their own experience and give examples if so inclined. Good discussion ensued and is outlined below under the values in question.

Pick your top 3-4:

1. Transparency = **50%**

2. Accountability = **56%**
3. Responsiveness = **50%**
4. Communication/Public Engagement = **56%**
5. Fiscal Responsibility = **6%**
6. Diversity/Equity/Inclusion/Human Rights = **81%**
7. Other = **6% (Visionary/modernization)**

Transparency/Accountability

- 1- An attendee shared a situation where a certain ordinance violation regarding neighborhood zoning was not handled well. In order for the problem to be properly addressed, residents (including the neighbor in violation) had to attend multiple town meetings and engage in other forms of outreach in order for the problem to be taken seriously and ultimately solved. The following is a link to the Watertown news article about this specific zoning controversy <https://www.watertownmannews.com/2019/01/04/letter-neighbors-upset-by-two-story-addition-5-feet-from-rear-property-line/>
- 2- We would benefit from an appointment committee vs. giving all the decision-making power to one individual (with regard to appointing CRC Committee members).

Communication/Public Engagement

- 1- We need to do better with our O & E efforts. Specifically, we should be soliciting and valuing community input. There is an impression that public input is a nuisance to the town, and is often solved by passing the buck or with delayed/no response. We might better serve the town and this process by asking questions of residents vs. sending them droves of content to read and seek out on their own.
- 2- When it comes to O&E, it's not the structure of our government that matters most, it's about the technology and how info is accessible to all.
- 3- Many are curious & hopeful about the new Communications subcommittee - looking forward to hearing their specific plans moving forward.

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion/Human Rights:

- 1- Historically and presently, Watertown's council/manager/employees/police/school boards/public officials do not represent the diversity of our town. The dismissal of the previously proposed Human Rights Commission is still very upsetting to residents.
- 2- There is concern with ongoing racism and accessibility issues in Watertown Public Schools. An example was shared where a student requiring ESL support was met with resistance and negativity. Another example was provided regarding a Watertown employee was the victim of targeted harassment and fired shortly thereafter.
- 3- Previous in-person town hall meetings seemed to establish a real divide in power between the council and residents (with councilors at a high table in front of the attendees). Whether intended or unintended, it instilled a level of intimidation for some. The zoom platform seems to have "leveled the playing field" in many ways. It is the hope that the council stays mindful of this moving forward.
- 4- An attendee started a nice conversation in semantics r.e. "substantive values" vs. "procedural values." Diversity and equity live under the umbrella of substantive values, while procedural values are in service to substantive values and include things like transparency & accountability. It is important to know the difference in establishing what kind of community we want to create.

Other (Visionary/Modernization)

- 1- There is little evidence of movement with the times. It seems like the current council leaders are married to old ideals, perhaps because of vested interests. Even the recent hire of a CIO seems years behind.

CLOSING POLL & FEEDBACK

It has become customary at the end of each CC to conduct a poll to track our progress as well as ask attendees for suggestions for future meetings. Below are the poll results and suggestions from today's CC. There were also some last minute questions and comments that are included below. We appreciate the time and commitment of all involved.

***POLL RESULTS:** "Rate today's Charter Chat on a scale of 1-5"

- 5 (Excellent): (3) 19%
- 4 (Great): (10) 63%
- 3 (Mediocre): (3) 19%
- 2 (Needs Work): 0%
- 1 (Poor): 0%

*Attendees are interested in adding an additional rating category between "mediocre" and "great".

INTEREST AREAS FOR FUTURE CHARTER CHATS

- 1- Generating thoughts and ideas for specific changes to the charter
- 2- Discussion regarding how the TC can hold the TM more accountable

REMAINING QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

- 1- When does the CRC actually start proposing changes to the charter?
- 2- Increased efforts should be made to include CRC members at the CC's so they can directly hear people's passions and views.
- 3- How can we funnel work done here in the CC to the official process?
- 4- How do we get more audience participation at the CRC meetings?
- 5- Someone suggested setting a goal of "hearing from 1000 people in Watertown" to collect stories and values
- 6- The Collins Center has a lot of great resources/documents that are available on the website.
- 7- Seems like there is interest in drafting a preamble – Marcy has compiled examples.