

The Charter Advisory Committee: Modernizing our City Government

By Joseph A. Curtatone

Over the past four years we have seen increased efficiency and accountability in the way we do business in Somerville thanks in large part to the implementation of our SomerStat management program. We have also seen cutting-edge modernization of our delivery of basic city services and customer service through our 311 Constituent Service Call Center. However, our continuing efforts to improve all aspects of city government are impeded by the City of Somerville's antiquated municipal charter. The charter not only outlines the nuts and bolts of city government, it also dictates the organization and function of each governmental body.

That is why, during my inaugural address in January, I announced my intention to form a Charter Advisory Committee to examine our existing municipal charter and to recommend changes aimed at modernizing city government. In May I opened the committee application process to all Somerville residents, and in June I announced its full membership. As of this week the committee has held four meetings and has called for an initial public comment period that will run from September 1st through September 8th.

Thus far, I have reviewed each of the committee meeting's minutes and have been impressed by both the depth and breadth of the discussions. This is a diverse group of individuals from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, all of whom have a vested interest in Somerville and its future.

I am extremely pleased by the committee's commitment to an open and transparent charter review process informed by plenty of opportunities for public input. A number of their discussions have focused on ways to involve the community in this process starting with the afore-mentioned public comment period that begins next week.

I want to encourage everyone to answer the committee's call and provide thoughts and feedback on the current charter and potential changes. This, I'm pleased to say, is only the first of many opportunities for community participation in this process. The committee is already discussing additional comment periods in the coming weeks and months, as well as a series of public hearings during which residents will have the opportunity to review and comment on specific aspects of the charter.

Additionally, the committee decided during its initial meeting to create a spotlighted location on the City's home page (<http://www.somervillema.gov/spotlight.cfm?id=67>) to advertise the meeting schedule, and make agendas, minutes and other relevant documents readily available. The page also contains the list of committee members and any relevant press releases.

I encourage everyone to visit this page regularly, as I do, to keep up to date on the committee's progress and future discussions.

I am excited to observe the committee's work over the coming months and the community input from the public comment periods and hearings. I am confident that the committee's eventual recommendations will not only modernize our city government but will make it even more accessible to our residents.

So please, take the time to participate in this process. Somerville's greatest strength lies in our residents and your input is essential to the success of the Charter Advisory Committee's efforts.

Again, for more information on the process, to review the committee's work up to this point, and to learn about the various mechanisms for community input please visit <http://www.somervillema.gov/spotlight.cfm?id=67>.