



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

***Members***

Meagan Benetti X  
Ben Echevarria  
Ona Ferguson X  
Zoe Iacovino X  
Jessica Lieberman X  
Emily Monea X  
Laura Pitone X  
Kat Rutkin X  
Beverly (Bev) Schwartz X  
Lucas Schaber X  
Crystal Turner X  
William (Bill) White X

**MINUTES**

Date, Time

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone's Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Charter Review Committee was conducted via remote participation

Members present: Meagan Benetti, Ona Ferguson, Zoe Iacovino, Jessica Lieberman, Emily Monea, Laura Pitone, Kat Rutkin, Beverly (Bev) Schwartz, Lucas Schaber, Crystal Turner, William (Bill) White

Members not present: Ben Echevarria

Staff attending: Anna Corning and Hope Williams

Other attending: Daniel Wong, Meredith Porter, Stephen Mackey, William Vallentta

Meeting started at 5:00PM

**Decisions:**

1. Decision Rule: Use Fist to Five on day to day discussion and gather consensus, yay/nay vote for final decisions
  - a. All 4s & 5s
2. Coordinating Team: 3 person coordinating team to lead committee/logistics, 2 standing members 1 rotating depending on current need
  - a. 5s, one 4 & one 3

3. Members of Coordinating Team: Bev Schwartz and Kat Rutkin as standing members and 3rd member rotating based on expertise and availability
  - a. All 5s
4. Technical Consultant Working Group: Approval of Bev, Kat, and Laura as working group to continue Collins Center conversations
  - a. All 5s
5. Final Vote Decision: Require  $\frac{3}{4}$  of entire committee to pass (ie 9/12)
  - a. All 5s
6. Recording Meeting: Decision to record the meetings from here on out
  - a. All 4s & 5s

### **Meeting Minutes:**

1. Welcome, Agenda Review
  - a. Hope welcomes committee and gives agenda overview
2. Approve 4/1 Meeting Minutes
  - a. Bev comment - Lucas listed both as attendee and panelist
  - b. Minutes approved
3. Decision Rule Proposal
  - a. Bev overview of fist to five. Overview: This method is helpful to get objections out for discussion and to be addressed. Excellent for gathering an overall sense of group in early discussions. Committee would commit to addressing concerns (someone votes, 0,1,2,3).
  - b. At the end of the process when voting on recommendations use a vote system of either yay, nay or abstain. Suggestion at least 8 or 9 out of 12 have strong support.
  - c. Ona adds - to get a good package with the best possible chance of successful recommendations, wide support is critical
  - d. Hope opens for discussion
    - i. Meagan Q: no final up and down vote until final decision?
      - a. Bev answers - Fist to Five piece by piece, coordinating team use their judgement about when to move on, if major concerns are presented won't move on.
    2. Emily Q: is the coordinating team Ona, Kat, Bev?
      - a. Ona answers - No, will make decision about who should be on that team
    3. Hope calls for Fist to Five on Proposal: All 4s and 5s. Decision Rule Proposal Approved.
4. Coordinating Team Proposal & Nomination
  - a. Kat gives an overview - suggesting a coordinating team to lead the committee instead of a chair. Help with agenda setting, leading discussions, proposals, etc. Could have rotating members or standing members.
  - b. Hope opens for discussion
    - i. Emily - The responsibilities of the coordinating committee and the structure makes a lot of sense

- ii. Jessica Q: how many people potentially on the team?
  - 1. Hope answers - 2-3, permanent would probably be best
- iii. Crystal - Agrees no Chair necessary
- iv. Emily - prefers idea of coordinating committee over a chair
  - 1. Lucas and Crystal agree in the chat
- v. Laura - Supportive of a committee, more minds is good. Standing is good. What about 2 standing members and 1 rotating member?
  - 1. Zoe, Ona, Meagan, and Jessica agree
- c. Hope calls for Fist to Five on having a coordinating team with 2 standing members and 1 rotating: 5s, one 4, and one 3.
  - i. Bev Q: Can we flesh out the 3 vote by Lucas?
  - ii. Lucas - concerned about scheduling and timing with 3 people. Floating might be more difficult, but happy with it if everyone else is.
  - iii. Meagan Q: Will we always check in with folks who give a 3 or less (in fist to five)?
    - 1. Bev - a 3 means "I approve but I see some minor issues that we could address later." If anybody raises an issue (3 or less) we want to check in immediately
    - 2. Meagan - wants to make sure we are uncovering issues at the time they are brought up
    - 3. Emily Q: will we keep track of what needs to be addressed?
      - a. Hope - A + I will in minutes and could create a doc
- d. Ona Q: Did we name our exact super majority threshold for final votes? What if we have abstentions, 8/12 or 9/12, do you not count in denominator if you abstain?
  - i. Bev - so do we want 9 no matter what or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of those who vote?
  - ii. Laura - is it a super majority of who is present?
  - iii. Ona - every member needs to vote whether they are present or not, especially at the end. Laura mentions OML concerns with voting outside meetings.
  - iv. Bev - would like to see 8 or 9 no matter what. In a perfect world there's 100% consensus but too unrealistic to achieve. We could hold out on all this specific decision, and what matters is how strong the number of yay's.
  - v. Bill - The more weight behind these recommendations is better, since by the time these recommendations are made there will be a lame duck mayor or new mayor, and at least 5 new cc members. Higher the better.
  - vi. Jessica - since this is for the final product, if there is a substantial # of abstention, that's important. Says she thinks  $\frac{3}{4}$  of full committee or 9/12 members.
    - 1. Lucas, Kat, Zoe, Emily agree in chat
- e. Hope calls for Fist to Five on needing 9 committee members voting yay for final decision to pass: All 5s.
- f. Hope pivots back to coordinating team discussion
  - i. 2 standing members and 1 rotating members - Hope opens to discussion of who is interested
    - 1. Bev is interested - eager, has time, fair minded, wants everyones opinions, dedicated

2. Kat is interested - really enjoyed working on the interim committee, interested in process, works with a lot of groups around the city, excited to bring typically unengaged groups to the table, enjoys talking to people
3. Laura and Ona express interest in being a rotating member
4. Emily - know I won't have the time to devote, I know people on this committee have specific skill sets they could offer to the standing committee, based on topics and expertise
5. Bev - asks who else might be interested, what the role might look like, and what expertise might be needed between meetings
6. Lucas - agrees with recognizing it might work better to have the rotating member based on the expertise needed between meetings and who is available
  - a. Kat and Jessica agree
7. Hope calls for Fist to Five of Bev and Kat as standing members and a 3rd member rotating based on expertise and availability: All 5s

## 5. Process Plan Proposal

- a. Ona outlines proposal - Different ways to tackle this intellectual task, complicated, information, language, we want to make sure we are addressing in a coherent way
  - i. Originally laid out 10-15 ways to skin the cat, and realized we needed to step back look more high level
  - ii. Came up with a broad brush work plan and way to approach this task
  - iii. Values, learning about the charter, community input, approach for tackling the charter itself, drafting
  - iv. Outstanding Qs: when/how do we engage public, ongoing input, etc.
- b. Hope opens for discussion
  - i. Emily - might be helpful to do some learning about charters before we dig in to values, ideas, etc.
  - ii. Bev - I thought it important to have the values discussion first, doesn't want to draw a box. Wanted big creative ideas, start big, and then narrow down as necessary
  - iii. Laura - likes the idea of discrete times for community input based on tasks in the process and has different perspectives regarding CE and values. We can have a foundational values conversation, but one we start CE, this needs to be tied into the charter process. Public needs to understand what charters are, otherwise values might be very disconnected.
  - iv. Jessica - build CE into the plan, when do we come back to the values discussion? We should continue to revisit building this into the process plan, are there changes or just reminding ourselves the values.
  - v. Crystal - prioritize CE, Nov deadline creates constraints. Identify the key pieces that need to be addressed quickly.

1. Bev agrees and explains values discussion is next, looking to answer what does a government who operates under value “X” look like
  - vi. Ona - public only has limited appetite for number of times they will weigh in, and then smaller opportunities
    1. Laura thumbs up
  - vii. Hope - CE initial strategy is important, will discuss with coordinating team
    1. Lucas Q: For CE, will committee have access to city translation services?
    2. Emily answers - An agenda item should be establishing a budget for this committee by June 1st. Sketch out what resources we might need and include things like tech experts and translation services. The communications dept is available to the committee.
      - a. Bev Q: What is the ballpark budget?
      - b. Emily answers - can get back on a budget. More effective for committee to create a list and proposal of what might be needed and then if administration can't meet those needs, then regroup
    3. Kat in chat - Welcome Project (Ben's org) might have youth translators we can hire
      - a. Ona supports
  - viii. Meagan - there should be direct public feedback on charter draft at the end
  - ix. Bev - live action role play, allows group to play out an issue or scenario
  - x. Hope reminds of the existing public survey and newsletter
    1. Lucas asks if committee can be added to newsletter list, Anna says yes
  - c. Hope updates on tech consultant, closed RFP, applicant didn't meet needs. Potentially moving forward with Collins Center, need to have intro call and scope definition
    - i. Could create a working group to assist in the process and expectation setting with collins center. Want to bring on someone ASAP.
    - ii. Hope opens for discussion -
      1. Lucas - Bev, Kat, and one other join a working group for consultants?
        - a. Laura volunteers
      2. Bev - Newton used Collins Center, read Newton's final report, and they succeeded in their process. Comfortable with using Collins Center.
      3. Hope - So Laura volunteers, with Kat and Bev, anyone else interested?
        - a. Emily supports Laura being rotating member for tech consultant
    - iii. Hope calls for Fist to Five on Bev, Kat, and Laura as the working group for Collins Center discussions: all 5s
    - iv. Hope - No rules as to what committee can/might propose in new Charter
      1. Policy vs legal questions, most questions will be policy. Policy questions - Collins Center, City solicitor - very specific legal questions, advisory.
      2. Ona - Ben was the one who brought this up so want to make sure he is in the loop on this, follow up conversation (Hope will reach out directly)
6. Prompted Values Discussion
- a. Bev leads discussion - start list with words from bios on website, are these values that the committee agrees with, what do you want to add/take away. Perhaps use the phrase - “We want a city that is \_\_\_\_\_.”

- i. Bev - example: efficient might come in conflict with other items
  - ii. Kat - I like this list, adds the value of bringing more people in, integrated in process educating public to know what city council can do
  - iii. Jessica - responding to more people at the table, processes that include a lot of people are often more frustrating in municipal systems
  - iv. Kat - yes. greater representation, not just more people. Everyone's needs to be addressed
  - v. Emily - value of justice/just. Beyond equity, fix the structures and look at the tools in play. address underlying structures that lead to tools people actually interact with. Fixing the structure is way toward a just city.
  - vi. Ona - caring for people, suite of things that are providing to people, emotional connection. Land/environmental concern - sustainable
  - vii. Zoe - accountability, can include transparency
  - viii. Meagan - enforces Emily's suggestion of just, want people to feel heard
  - ix. Emily - want people who don't feel they have the agency to speak to speak up.
  - x. Lucas - bringing new voices in. Those who don't typically get involved. Staying effective behind the scenes
  - xi. Crystal - government that is representative, logical, functional, decisions
  - xii. Jessica - Government a place where people feel safe and welcome, space where there are changes in the future, just and equitable and efficient processes for getting those addressed
  - xiii. Bev - coordinating team will bring this brainstorm together into distilled list
- b. Bev assigns "homework" - Asks committee to brainstorm: I know my government embodies these values when \_\_\_\_\_. I want to see a government that does \_\_\_\_\_.
- i. Emily - element of city government that learns and grows. Organizations as a whole need to be able to evaluate what has been done and learn and adapt accordingly. How can governments adapt in real time?
  - ii. Ona - prioritizing children, safe community when children are fed, safe on streets and well educated
  - iii. Need examples of when we interact with government - emails, developments, etc
  - iv. Bev mentions Newton shrunk city council size, to increase representation. Now the issue our city council has is they don't have their own staff. How do we solve this?
  - v. Lucas - echos using children as bellwether, we could address all vulnerable communities in general. If vulnerable communities are cared for and healthy, then the rest of the city is probably doing okay.
  - vi. Bev - involved with youth org, showing up to meetings. Budgets, financial reports in this case on this issue, mayor can be very efficient, if benevolent, if you have a mayor that is not trying to do the right thing. Where is the accountability? Rules to protect but not hinder. Wants something in between
    1. Crystal agrees in chat
  - vii. Kat - agrees with Bev, and also wants contributions from everyone. We've had the same mayor for so long, how will this existing government feel and work

with a new mayor? Keeps thinking how different the city will be, and don't want to make decisions based on how this one person has been in power for so long.

viii. Zoe - trust in government, from constituents' underlying theme. There should be less effort to have a voice heard. Trust the government will make choices that reflect you and your needs.

1. Megan and Jessica agree in chat

## 7. Next Steps and Wrap Up

- a. Hope explains that project managers want feedback from the committee if necessary on the process of meeting, how to improve meetings, etc.
- b. Hope Q: Does the committee want to record committee meetings?
  - i. Crystal ok with it, Bev, Kat, Meagan, and Ona all support
  - ii. Hope calls for Fist to Five on whether to record committee meetings: 4s and 5s. Meetings will now be recorded and posted.
- c. Next meeting is April 28th at 5PM. Hope asks the committee to fill out the poll to get a recurring meeting set from May onward.
- d. Homework brainstorm: values and how government can reflect these values
- e. Budget expertise - volunteer to join Bev and Kat?
  - i. Emily - if there is a sense of what we want to include, she's happy to assist in translation with departments to get a sense of cost estimates
  - ii. Anna and Hope will research how Watertown and Newton spent money
- f. Meagan - would like to think through CE strategy, who are the hardest people to reach. How do we reach them?
  - i. Zoe - urban planning student. Project with engaging public virtually, has some fresh insight can tap into other students

Meeting concluded at 7:00PM

*Next meeting date – The next meeting date will be April 28th at 5PM. It will be held remotely using zoom. Instructions to join the meeting will be provided on the meeting agenda posted at City Hall and on the City's website.*

Documents distributed:

- Fist to Five image