



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

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

Members

Meagan Benetti X
Ben Echevarria X
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

April 1, 2021, 3pm EST

Members present: All 12 members present

Members not present: None

Staff attending: Anna Corning, Hope Williams

Other attending: JT Scott, Meredith Porter, Renee Scott, DW, Willie Brunley Jr, Leigh Meunier, Malcolm Cummins, Matthew McLaughlin, Pat Cain, Renee Scott, Bill Shelton, George Pillsbury, Jesse Clingan, JT Scott

Meeting started at 3pm.

1. Welcome and Norms
 - a. Project Managers Hope and Anna introduce themselves and go over Zoom norms.
 - b. Agenda for meeting is presented.
2. Introductions
 - a. All twelve committee members give 1-2 sentence introductions about themselves in alphabetic order by last name.
3. Open Meeting Law Overview
 - a. Project Manager Hope explains Open Meeting Law, and how meetings will be open to the public. Explains that deliberation outside the meeting is not allowed, and deliberation is any communication among a quorum of committee members. The committee can still

have working partners or working groups. Continues to explain that Hope and Anna will be responsible for posting agendas and minutes, but the committee will be the driving force for the agenda.

- b. Hope asks the committee how they feel about public comment.
 - i. Bill explains that he wants to ensure community voices are heard in this process and this is a priority.
 - ii. Ben mentions that he wants to learn more about the process itself before making any decisions about public comment.
 - iii. Bev asks about community engagement outside of public meetings, Hope explains that yes creating a CE strategy will definitely be part of the review process.
 - iv. Emily asks if the chat will be saved and published? This will be figured out, most likely not needed.
4. Charter Review Process Overview
 - a. Project Manager Anna goes over the committee goals: review and understand the charter and find areas for improvement, seek community input about charter changes, and present potential charter changes. Anna continues with committee duties: solutions oriented discussions and community engagement, input, and discussion. Anna explains the project managers duties as facilitators, execution of community engagement, and coordination.
 - b. Anna continues into the charter review overview, explaining we will have a process meeting with a handout at the next meeting. The goal of the committee is to complete the process by November. Anna then explains available resources and the role of the law department and tech consultant. Anna opens for questions and discussion.
 - i. Ben raises the question of the benefits of an independent council in place of the law department. Three other committee members chime in and agree that project managers should seek out the question of an independent council. Hope and Anna say they will look into the possibility of an independent council, or bringing on a technical consultant with legal qualifications.
 - ii. Bev would appreciate more background about charter changes, what works, and get someone (community members from cities recently with charter changes) input on how charter changes impacted them.
 - iii. Ona asks about Anna + Hope's role and time, as well as tech consultant.
 1. Anna responds that they are both part time, 19 hours a week, and brought on specifically for this project. Hope clarifies that she is also a resident of Somerville.
 - iv. Laura mentions wanting committee members to be involved in the hiring process of the tech consultant, several other members emphasized this.
 1. Anna and Hope will connect with the purchasing office on this.
 2. Other members also emphasized potentially having their own outside counsel, not the law department of the city.
 - v. Ona asks more broadly why are we here, who is waiting for this recommendations, what is the time frame.

1. City council and mayor jointly convened this committee, end of the year timeline.
 - vi. Bill comments that this should be an open and transparent process, needed outside council. Will be even better with substantial support from the entire committee and the Somerville community
 - vii. Ben asks what the structure of the committee will be and if there will be a chair/leader?
 1. Anna explains that a chair is not mandated, and most of the work of a chair is admin heavy and guiding discussion, so the project managers felt a chair was not necessary. Ben mentions it would be good to have someone on the committee to make final calls and decisions
 2. Laura brings up the possibility of having an “admin team” in place of a chair, who would help make the agenda and guide decisions.
 3. Emily mentions the decision rule might be useful to discuss now, the Committee agrees that before the issue of the chair is decided, they should go over the decision making rule.
5. Decision Making Rule
 - a. The floor is open to discuss the decision making rule. There is a brief conversation on consensus versus majority, and how consensus will make recommendations stronger.
 - i. Ben mentions that Ona is well-versed in this area, and Ona says it’s possible that we will want different decision making rules for different situations and decisions.
 - ii. Ben, Bev, Kat all suggest it's too early for this in the process.
 - iii. Jessica and Laura mention a gradient of agreement option, or the “fist of 5 decision making option.” Other members are interested in this and want more information.
 - iv. Others continue to emphasize they don’t feel comfortable taking a vote right now and want time to think over the decision, requesting to mull over possibilities until the next meeting.
 - b. Laura brings up the possibility of creating a process working group to write a decision making proposal, which they will bring to the next meeting. This group will also help drive the next agenda and talk about process options before the handout is sent out.
 - i. Ona, Bev, and Kat volunteer, and the committee agrees that this is the process working group, who will set up a time to meet with Hope and Anna in the coming business days.
6. Scheduling future meetings
 - a. Next two meetings will be scheduled week by week, but starting in May we will have a standing every other week meeting.
7. Requests for additional information for committee
 - a. Committee requests process overview, information on charter changes from other cities’ reviews, previous somerville recommendations, and background information of charters/ language definitions.
8. Meeting Adjourned

The committee meeting ended at 4:40.

Next meeting date – The next meeting date is Tuesday, April 13th 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:

- none