



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

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

**MINUTES**

March 24, 2022, 5PM

Members present: Ben Echevarria, Ona Ferguson, George Proakis, Laura Pitone, Beverly (Bev) Schwartz, Kat Rutkin, Jessica Lieberman, Crystal Turner, Zoe Iacovino

Members not present: Meagan Benetti, Matthew McLaughlin, Lucas Schaber

Staff attending: Anna Corning, Hope Williams, Collins Center - Elizabeth Corbo, Collins Center - Steve McGoldrick, Collins Center - Marilyn Contreas

Other attending: Kimberly Wells, Meredith Porter, Jack Perenick

Meeting started at 5:05PM

**Decisions:**

1. Committee approved minutes from 3/10.
  - a. Seven 5s
2. Committee approved the current draft charter from the writing working group, with some simplification edits and further clarification in the department head section.
  - a. Seven 5s
3. Committee approved removing the current provision allowing terminated department heads to request a reinstatement hearing in front of city council, and approved including only language that department heads serve at the discretion of the mayor and may be removed by the mayor.
  - a. Eight 5s

*The committee uses the Fist to Five method of voting, a technique for gauging consensus. Voting ranges from 0 to 5. The scale is: 0 - no way, 1 - major issues to be resolved now, 2 - minor issues to be resolved now, 3 - minor issues to be resolved later, 4 - comfortable with this as it is, 5 - love this and will champion it. 0-2 is considered a lack of consensus, while 3-5 is considered consensus.*

**NOTES**

1. Welcome 5:03
  - a. Anna welcomed the committee and community members.
2. Approve 3/10 Minutes 5:09
  - a. **Meeting minutes from 3/10 were approved.**
3. Public Comment 5:10

- a. There were two public comments, one from Jack Perenick (flexibility in appointment terms) and one from Meredith Porter (multiple member bodies treating everyone with equal respect).
4. Writing Team Drafting Document 5:15
    - a. Anna opened the discussion about the drafted charter language written by the writing team. Many committee members thanked the writing team for their work. Bev commented that the department head language could be clearer.
      - i. **Committee approved of the current draft charter from the writing working group, with some simplification edits and further clarification in the department head section.**
5. Deliberation Topic 1: Revisiting Compensation of Elected Officials 5:20
    - a. Committee discussed the possibility of including a tying mechanism to the pay of elected officials, per the request of a committee member. Ben explained that this could look like having a set multiplier which would set the pay ceiling for elected officials based upon the lowest paid city staff member, citing this as an equity issue. The committee emphasized the importance that this should raise everyone up, and we want to make sure it does not bring anyone's pay down in reality. The committee also discussed the logistics of how this could be possible and the best path forward.
      - i. Straw poll: How should the committee move forward with this tying mechanism option?
        1. Directly in charter, all specifics decided by committee - 0 votes
        2. Directly in charter, broad with specifics decided by study - 4 votes
        3. Study committee - 4 votes
    - b. Anna tabled the final vote to the next meeting, once there is some example language for the committee.
6. Deliberation Topic 2: Department Heads 5:55
    - a. Anna reviewed the decisions made by the committee on department heads, and brought up the reappointment process/term lengths and the removal process for department heads. Committee discussed the term lengths for these roles, specifically between 3 or 4 year terms versus no terms. The committee deliberated the core purpose of the reappointment.
      - i. Straw poll: Does the committee want to include term lengths for these roles in the charter?
        1. Yes to terms - 5
        2. No to terms - 2
        3. Abstain from vote - 1
    - b. The committee continued the conversation around the core purpose of reappointment, especially considering the complicated relationship between City Council and department heads. Laura Pitone brought up the HR difficulty of having department heads being able to be essentially fired via City Council every 3 to 4 years when they are not regularly accountable to City Council. The committee discussed the uncertainty no matter what based on the mayoral election. Libby Corbo from the Collins Center brought up the

difficulty about this issue on a labor and employment front. Bev Schwartz explained a shift in her position from terms to no terms, pointing to a shift in the committee based upon the deliberations.

- i. Straw poll: 4 year terms or no terms?
  1. 4 year terms - 0
  2. No terms - 6
  3. Abstain from vote - 2
- c. Anna tabled the final vote on this to the next meeting, and moved the conversation forward to removal of department heads. Anna explained that currently in Somerville, there is a provision that allows for a removed department head to request a hearing in front of City Council and City Council can reinstate them. The committee discussed that some positions might need a safeguard, like the Director of Racial and Social Justice, and that those would be able to stay in place. The committee considered if it is best for the city to have a hostile/toxic work environment between a mayor and a department head, and that wrongful termination is covered in employment law. Many committee members express support in getting rid of this provision.
  - i. **Committee approved removing the current provision allowing terminated department heads to request a reinstatement hearing in front of city council, and approved including only language that department heads serve at the discretion of the mayor and may be removed by the mayor.**
- d. Anna introduced the discussion of temporary appointments. The committee discussed length of temporary appointments, and the pros and cons of shorter (60/90 days) or longer (150 days) temporary appointments. Ben Echevarria brought up that 60 days is not a lot of time to hire a department head. Bev Schwartz suggested there could be a justification necessary for every extension of the temporary appointment. The committee wants clarification on what happens after the appointment expires, and Anna explains that the temporary appointment is no longer in the position. Bev proposed having 150 days for temporary appointments, with the possibility of having 60 day extensions to be approved by city council. Other committee members supported Bev's idea. Anna tabled the final decision on this to the next meeting.

7. Closing:

- a. Anna thanked everyone and reminded them the next meeting is April 7th at 5PM.