

# **Charter Review Final Recommendations**

Somerville Charter Review Committee  
September 8, 2022

# Values

We seek to revise the Somerville Charter to make our government more **just, empowering, responsive** and **innovative** for its residents.

# Creation & Mission

## Creation

October 2021 - Former Mayor Joe Curtatone and City Council President Matt McLaughlin create an *advisory* charter review committee

## Charge

Review the City's current charter and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council for amendments in an effort to improve and modernize the City's structure and governance

## Composition

12 members: one designee of the Mayor, one of the City Council President and one of the School Committee chair, plus nine community members selected by the mayor, city council and school committee chair

# Committee Process

Phase 1, March 2021 - June 2021

We discussed and decided on four key values to guide us through differing opinions on policy questions:

**just, empowering, responsive** and **innovative**.

We adopted a consensus-based approach to decision-making known as the “fist-to-five voting method.”

We created three working groups: a coordinating team, community engagement team, and writing team.

## Fist to Five Voting



No way! I strongly object



I see major concerns, we need to discuss further



I still have reservations and would like to discuss some minor issues



I'm not in full agreement but I feel comfortable moving forward



Good idea/plan, I'm happy to move forward with it



It's a great idea, I fully support it and will champion it!



# Committee Process

## Phase 2, July 2021 - October 2021

We learned about charters in general, Somerville's current charter, and charters of other municipalities.

We leveraged our technical consultant from Collins Center at UMass Boston.

We reviewed an exemplar charter created by our consultant and from this flagged issues to be deliberated.

We commissioned 7 interviews of current and former city employees and elected officials.

- Katjana Ballantyne, Mayor
- Joe Curtatone, Former Mayor
- John Long, Former City Clerk
- Matt McLaughlin, City Council President
- Tim Snyder, Former Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
- Ed Bean, Director of Finance, City Auditor
- George Proakis, Former Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development
- Nick Salerno, Chair of Elections and Ethics Commission
- Stephanie Hirsch, Former City Councilor, SomerStat Director, ResiStat Director, SomerPromise, Project Specialist to the Mayor

# Committee Process

## Phase 3, November 2021 - August 2022

We used a deliberative process for each decision, coming to consensus before continuing with the next topic. Often reminding ourselves of our guiding values.

We leveraged research of other municipal charters, evolving best practices, exemplar charter language and community input to guide our decisions.

We deliberated and voted on every element of the proposed charter.

## Phase 4, November 2021 - September 2022

The writing team drafted each provision as decisions were made to accurately capture recommendations in a draft charter. The committee reviewed several iterations of the draft.

Each committee member voted yay/nay on the final proposed charter, and it received unanimous support.

We had working groups to draft the final report and presentation.

# Community Engagement

- **Kick-off Event** at Foss Park on August 28, 2021 - **80 attendees**
- Tabling at farmer's markets and winter markets around Somerville
- City-wide mailers - **22,000 addresses**
- Four community meetings - 55 attendees
- **85 public comments** at committee meetings and via email
- A public hearing - **20+ attendees**
- Monthly newsletter - over 560 subscribers
- Outreach to **150 community organizations**
- **950+** residents took a community **survey**

# Recommendation Highlights

City Council authority to hire staff and independent advisory legal counsel

City Council Access to information provision

Improved appointment process for department heads, boards and commissions

Mayoral 4-year term

Chief Administrative Officer

Reduced signature requirements for at-large and ward-elected offices

Increased mechanisms for collaboration on the budget

Equitable Compensation Distribution Study Committee

Enfranchising non-citizen and 16 and 17 year old residents in municipal elections

Ranked Choice Voting Implementation Committee

Public Financing of Campaigns Study Committee

Periodic Review of Charter, Ordinance and Multiple Member Bodies (individually) every 10 years



# Thank you

Meagan Benetti, Community Member

Ben Echevarria, Community Member

Ona Ferguson, Community Member

Zoe Iacovino, Community Member

Jessica Lieberman, Community Member

Kat Rutkin, Community Member

Lucas Schaber, Community Member

Beverly Schwartz, Community Member

Crystal Turner, Community Member

Matthew McLaughlin, Ward 1 City Councilor and City Council President, City Council's Designee

William White, Former City Council Designee

Laura Pitone, Ward 5 School Committee Member, School Committee Chair's Designee

George Proakis, Former Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Mayor's Designee

Emily Monea, Former Mayor Designee