

City of Somerville

2025 Revised Charter



Overview of Relevant Changes

The 2025 Revised Charter:

- Clarifies separation of powers.
- Clarifies and codifies procedures for access to information.
- Establishes timelines for City Council action on:
 - confirmation of appointments;
 - amendments to the Administrative Code; and,
 - group petitions.
- Requires the City Council to hold two public hearings on the annual budget.

Separation of Powers

- Section 1-3 contains general language similar to previous charter, dividing the executive and legislative roles of the mayor and City Council.
- Section 2-2(b) specifically prohibits “interference with [the] Administration”.
 - Clarifies that the City Council does not have the authority, as the legislative body, to issue binding directives or orders.
 - Items that have historically been submitted as orders may be submitted as resolutions instead.

Access to Information

- Section 2-10 grants the City Council authority to issue binding demands for information to department heads and the mayor.
 - The Charter requires that a department head or the mayor be granted fourteen days notice to appear.
 - Orders must be specific requests for information about the services, functions, powers, or duties of a department head, or, for the mayor, on any municipal matter.
 - Orders must be “related to the official duties and responsibilities of the City Council”.

Confirmation of Appointments

- Sections 2-8, 3-5, and 3-6 grant the City Council authority to confirm or reject:
 - department heads;
 - members of multiple-member bodies;
 - police and fire employees;
 - the city attorney; and,
 - the chief administrative officer.
- An appointment generally must be acted on within thirty days after it appears on a City Council agenda.
- Rejection of appointments must be made in writing, outlining the reasons for rejection.
- Rejection of department heads, the city attorney, and the chief administrative officer requires a two-thirds majority of the City Council.

Administrative Code Amendments

Section 5-1 grants the City Council authority to approve or reject amendments to the Administrative Code. The City Council:

- Has sixty days to act on a proposed amendment to the Administrative Code.
- May only vote to approve or disapprove a proposed amendment to the Administrative Code.
- Must hold at least one public hearing on a proposed amendment to the Administrative Code.

Group Petitions

- Section 2-11 requires the City Council to hold a public hearing on any petition submitted to it by at least fifty voters.
- A public hearing on a group petition must be held within three months after the submission appears on a meeting agenda.
- A public hearing may not be held on any subject more than once in a twelve-month period.
 - Twelve months from the time the petition first appears on the agenda.

Budget Hearings

Sections 6-2 and 6-5 require the City Council to hold two public hearings related to the annual budget:

- On or before February 15, a community budget hearing to solicit public input regarding budget priorities.
- Following the submission of the proposed budget, a hearing on the entire proposed budget.

Questions?