



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Charter Review Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

6:00 PM

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Scott at 6:01 pm and adjourned at 6:56 pm on a Roll Call Vote: 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present: Aneesh Sahni – Intergovernmental Affairs Director; Kimberly Wells – City Clerk; Bernabe Rodriguez – Assistant City Clerk; Brendan Salisbury – Legislative and Policy Analyst; Stephen McGoldrick - Edward J. Collins Center for Public Management; Beverly Schwartz – Charter Review Committee Member; Jessica Lieberman - Charter Review Committee Member

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Vice Chair Kristen Strezo, Willie Burnley Jr., Matthew McLaughlin, Lance L. Davis, Ben Ewen-Campen, Judy Pineda Neufeld, Jesse Clingan, Jake Wilson, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Charlotte Kelly

Committee
Minutes
(ID # [23-0342](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Charter Review Special Committee Meeting of March 8, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Scott, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Gomez Mouakad and Kelly

2. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [22-1520](#))

Charter Review Committee conveying its recommendations and proposed Charter text.

Chair Scott referred the Committee to the slides dated 03.22.23, related to the Miscellaneous recommendations.

The discussion began with the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to write a new and modernized Charter, noting that this was preferable to amending further, as the document has already been amended and overridden by state law numerous times in a manner that causes confusion.

Chair Scott moved to support the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to write a new and modernized Charter. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0

opposed, 0 absent.

The next area of discussion was the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to add a group petition mechanism, which would require the City Council to hold a public hearing within three months on every petition submitted and signed by at least 100 municipal voters. Councilor Wilson expressed concern about the language “signed by at least 100 municipal voters”, wondering if an indication of “at least 100 eligible voters” would be more clear. Councilor Davis clarified that municipal voter is a defined term and is the correct term to use here.

Chair Scott moved to support the recommended language by the Charter Review Committee to add a group petition mechanism. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

The next recommendation of the Charter Review Committee that was discussed was to maintain the vacancy process for at-large and ward City Councilors. Councilor McLaughlin noted that the language mirrors recent changes made to prevent Councilors from hand-selecting their successor. He expressed support for this language.

Councilor McLaughlin moved to support the recommended language by the Charter Review Committee to maintain the vacancy process for at-large and ward City Councilors. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

The recommendation before the Committee next was to change the vacancy process for Mayor. Chair Scott noted that this may be moot, as the Council’s recommendation was to retain the two-year Mayoral term. Beverly Schwartz noted that a motion was previously made to amend this language to reflect that intent.

The next area of discussion was the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to maintain the current composition of the School Committee.

Chair Scott moved to support the recommended language by the Charter Review Committee to maintain the current composition of the School Committee. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

The next recommendation of the Charter Review Committee that was discussed was to keep the School Committee terms at two years.

Chair Scott moved to support the recommended language by the Charter Review Committee to keep the School Committee terms at 2 years. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

The recommendation before the Committee next was to maintain the vacancy process for School Committee members. Chair Scott highlighted that this is very different from the City Councilor vacancy process. Ms. Schwartz commented that discussion was held regarding making the process the same as for the City

Council, but the School Committee representative had concerns about the burden of a vacant seat and the need to quickly fill it to meet quorum for subcommittees. Councilor Burnley asked if the School Committee was considered when the changes were previously made regarding the City Council. Councilor McLaughlin shared that the discussion at the time included consideration of the costs and the costs for a single ward election (which would be the case for all School Committee seats) were determined to be reasonable.

Chair Scott moved to support the recommended language by the Charter Review Committee to maintain the vacancy process for School Committee members. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

The next area of discussion was the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to maintain current eligibility requirements to run for office. Jessica Lieberman shared that there were concerns that this was not changed to the municipal voter eligibility because if elected, the individual would be an employee of the city, with the eligibility requirements that come with that, such as age and work status. Councilor Davis noted that for Mayor, the eligibility specifies any statewide voter in Somerville, whereas for Councilor, the eligibility is any statewide voter. Councilor Davis suggested that a change to the definition of statewide voter could be the simplest way to resolve and clarify this.

Chair Davis moved to request amended language to ensure that candidates for Mayor and Councilor At Large are required to be residents of the City of Somerville. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Wilson, Burnley, Gomez Mouakad, Kelly, Strezo, Scott), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE