

Longmeadow Charter Commission Minutes
DATE: January 21, 2004 TIME: 7:03-8:42 PM
PLACE: Longmeadow High School Teacher's Lounge

This was the 29th meeting of the Longmeadow Charter Commission. Present: Susan R. Altman, Kathleen E. Grady, William Hoff, Arlene C. Miller (Vice Chair), R. Peter Landon, Roger F. Nadeau, Joseph A. Occhiuti, Rebecca M. Townsend (Clerk) and Roger B. Wojcik (Chair). One member of the public and one member of the press (Longmeadow News) were present.

1. Mr. Wojcik opened the meeting and the **Public Comment** time. Mr. Nolet complimented the Commission and said that he appreciated the “good things weaved into the charter.” He spoke in favor of the Preliminary Home Rule Charter and noted that the town cannot run a 40-50 million dollar organization with 50 elected boards. He asked whether everything written into a charter is “written in stone” and expressed concern that should any problems arise 2-3 years into the charter’s implementation, would there be any flexibility to the charter? Mr. Wojcik said that parts of it could be changed by Town Meeting bylaw, such as the number of signatures required to petition a warrant article for a referendum vote. Dr. Grady pointed out that changing the type of legislature, the number and terms of the Select Board, and the powers and duties of the Town Manager would require a change in the charter. Ms. Miller noted that other provisions may be amended with a two-thirds Town Meeting vote and a simple majority vote in a subsequent town election. With a Home Rule Charter, the state legislature is no longer required to approve a town’s organization. Mr. Occhiuti added that the function and duties of the Town Manager was designed with flexibility in mind; we didn’t want to “pigeon-hole” the future government. Mr. Nolet thanked the group and added that it seemed that change could occur, but it could not be done frivolously, or over night. Mr. Wojcik asked if there were any other comments and hearing none, closed the Public Comment time.
2. Mr. Wojcik opened review of the **minutes of January 14, 2004**. Ms. Miller noted some typographical errors and moved that the minutes be accepted with corrections. Mr. Occhiuti seconded, and the vote was unanimously in favor.
3. Mr. Wojcik opened discussion of the **public hearings on the Preliminary Charter Report**. He asked the group for ideas for the message or content we should bring to the hearings, and what we should expect from the participants.
 - a. Ms. Miller reported on the meeting of the Republican Town Committee, where she and Ms. Townsend spoke. We received good feedback and answered people’s questions. She suggested we spend no more than 20 minutes reviewing where we’ve been, describe the process, note that the consensus of the group was in favor of the charter in total, note the transition and amendment processes, highlight what is distinctive about the charter, especially the Executive, Administrative and Legislative branches. Ms. Townsend added that we might want to say that the model has changed since the early December 2003 Discussion Series. We’ve taken comments seriously and made changes where possible. We may also stress the importance of having a Home Rule charter, a constitution that

outlines powers and duties for local government. Mr. Hoff said we should note the importance of approving the charter: if it doesn't get approved, the town's arrangement stands as is.

- b. Mr. Occhiuti and Mr. Wojcik reported on the Lions Club meeting they spoke with, indicating they received thoughtful questions and comments. Dr. Grady and Mr. Landon stressed the importance of listening to what people have to say.
 - c. Members concurred that we need to provide some structure for the hearing at the start, by briefly explaining the charter. The remainder of the time should be spent listening to comments, questions, and answering questions or clarifying any points so that the charter's provisions are clear to all.
 - d. Mr. Wojcik will prepare the slides and arrange the order.
 - e. Mr. Wojcik noted that there will be a Town Meeting warrant article sponsored by the Board of Selectmen which proposes to change the manner in which the Water and Sewer Commission members are selected from elected to appointed. Members discussed the benefits of the charter's system for handling elected/appointed boards.
 - f. Ms. Townsend noted that one concern that people have is over the inconsistency in personnel policies and pay; the current government model cannot require consistency. The proposed charter can. In terms of savings to the town, while that is not within this commission's purview, we did consider the cost factor in our deliberations. Mr. Landon noted that the long-term benefits of the charter extend also to collective bargaining, which accounts for 80% of Longmeadow's cost structure. Dr. Grady added that consistency and fairness would result.
4. Mr. Wojcik turned discussion to the practical matters of **the Public Hearings**. We would need: advertising, microphones that provided amplification for audience members and a chance to review the content in advance, and room set-up.
- a. Our Commission meeting on Tuesday, February 3 at 7:00PM would handle reviewing content.
 - b. Mr. Wojcik would check on what room we would use. Mr. Occhiuti and Mr. Hoff would find out how the room may be arranged.
 - c. Mr. Occhiuti showed samples of the notices that would be posted around town. Extras would be made. If we want people at the hearings, he stressed, we ought to reach as many people in as many ways as possible: letters or emails to groups (like PTOs and the LINK), or commission members' email lists, calling friends and urging them to do the same.
 - d. Mr. Occhiuti reported that the final cost of printing the Preliminary Home Rule Charter Report was less than estimated. The invoice reads \$2800, including inserts for the 400 store deliveries that the Reminder makes.
 - e. We discussed posting signs on Longmeadow St. as reminders of the public hearings. Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Occhiuti would handle those arrangements. Since the town prohibits signs of such kind anywhere else on public property, Mr. Occhiuti and Mr. Wojcik would work on getting signs noting the public hearings for willing homeowners to display.
5. Mr. Wojcik noted that a citizen's group is being formed to handle supporting the charter once it becomes a ballot question. Citizens have approached commission members

asking if they could help support the charter. The Charter Commission cannot legally participate in advocating an issue on the ballot question, but individual members, as private citizens may act in support of the charter.

6. **The Attorney General's report is due to the Commission by February 13 or 14th.** The Final Charter Commission Report is due to the Attorney General's Office by March 18th. We discussed and decided our meeting schedule:

Tuesday Evenings at 7:00pm on the following dates:
February 3, 17, and March 9.

Mr. Wojcik will check for locations for these meetings and tell Ms. Townsend (who will post them).

We would sign the Final Report on March 9.

7. Dr. Grady had a question regarding minority reports. Ms. Altman said that she has written one. Members asked whether they may read it in advance, to review it for accuracy as we had done for other documents. All the law indicates is that if one is written, the minority report must be filed with the Chair of the Charter Commission within 48 hours after voting on the Final Report. It appears to be silent on whether the group may review it in advance for accuracy. Mr. Wojcik asked Ms. Altman to provide him with the report by March 11th, so that he may get the whole package sent to the state offices by March 12th. Ms. Altman said that she would do that by March 11.
8. Mr. Hoff moved to adjourn meeting. Ms. Altman seconded. With all in favor, Mr. Wojcik adjourned the meeting at 8:42 pm.

Approved February 3, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca M. Townsend, Clerk