

MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Kathleen Born, Chair
Kaleb Abebe
Jessica DeJesus Acevedo
Mosammat Faria Afreen
Nikolas Bowie
Kevin Chen
Max Clermont
Jennifer Gilbert
Kai Long
Patrick Magee
Mina Makarious
Lisa Peterson
Ellen Shachter
Susan Shell
Jim Stockard

The Cambridge Charter Review Committee held a meeting on Tuesday, February 7, 2023. The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:30p.m. by the Chair of the Committee, Kathleen Born. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this meeting was remote via zoom.

At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Kaleb Abebe – Present
Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Present
Mosammat Faria Afreen – Absent
Nikolas Bowie – Present
Kevin Chen – Present
Max Clermont – Present
Jennifer Gilbert – Present
Kai Long – Present
Patrick Magee – Absent*
Mina Makarious – Absent
Lisa Peterson – Absent
Ellen Scachter – Absent
Susan Shell – Absent*
Jim Stockard – Present
Kathleen Born – Present
Present – 10, Absent – 5. Quorum established.
***Patrick Magee was marked present at 6:44p.m.**
***Susan Shell was marked present at 5:43p.m.**

Chair Born noted that there were seven written communications that were received from the public (Attachments A-G). Chair Born recognized member Jessica DeJesus Acevedo who made a motion to adopt the written communications and place them on file, the motion was seconded by member Kevin Chen.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Kaleb Abebe – Yes

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Yes

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Absent

Nikolas Bowie – Yes

Kevin Chen – Yes

Max Clermont – Yes

Jennifer Gilbert – Yes

Kai Long – Yes

Patrick Magee – Absent

Mina Makarious – Absent

Lisa Peterson – Absent

Ellen Shachter – Yes

Susan Shell – Yes

Jim Stockard- Yes

Kathleen Born – Yes

Yes – 11, No – 0, Absent – 4. Motion passed.

The Chair, Kathleen Born opened public comment.

Suzanne Blier thanked Committee members for holding the public forums and noted she looks forward to Committee members speaking on the differences on what is happening with relative proportionality in other municipalities.

Anna Corning began the meeting by introducing Michael Ward, Patricia Lloyd and Elizabeth Corbo from the Collins Center who did an overview of their memo (Attachment H). After the presentation members from the Collins Center made themselves available to Committee members who had any questions or concerns.

Members from the Charter Review Committee went into discussion about elections and their takeaway from the presentation made by the Election Commission from the previous meeting. Members offered comments and suggestions, with some of the topics focused on rank choice voting, reviewing Chapter 54A, its repeal and how it affected Cambridge, voting turnout numbers, the possibility of having four-year and/or alternating terms for Council members, and even and odd year elections.

Michael Ward from the Collins Center shared that there are significant challenges with even number year elections on the same day as State and Federal elections. He noted that there are both State law and Federal law challenges that would have to be thought through. He shared that the Collins Center would look more into it to try and get a better understanding and provide information as it comes.

Member Nikolas Bowie stressed the importance of the role Charter Review Committee members have.

Anna Corning noted that she will pull some data from other cities and towns that have elections that fall on even years to see what the voting turnout numbers are compared to odd years.

Members Jennifer Gilbert, Jessica DeJesus Acevedo, Kevin Chen, Kai Long, and Susan Shell shared their concerns and challenges they took away from the Election Commissions presentation. A suggestion that was made was to have more outreach with public housing to engage and educate to get more voters out. One concern that was brought up was around ward based elections and ward representations, and the challenges that could come with it.

The Chair, Kathleen Born shared that New York currently moved to non-citizen voting for their School Committee, which has been successful. She also noted that some communities have been looking into Universal Suffrage, for a larger expanded group to vote, including younger people. She shared that it is based off the premise that federal aid and representation is built out on a census basis, which includes non-citizens and children, who are people that should be included in the voting process.

Member Kai Long had a clarifying question regarding the possibility of having a digital option for elections. Elizabeth Corbo responded noting that she's not aware of any. Michael Ward shared it is something that the Collins Center can look in to.

Member Jim Stockard offered comments around how to make residents feel more comfortable coming out to vote and was open to suggestions on how the Charter Review Committee could make that possible. He also offered ideas on ballot questions that could potentially help to get more residents out to vote.

Member Patrick Magee shared thoughts on how the community can engage with university type cities and towns, where the turnover population is always changing, and focusing on those specific demographics.

Anna Corning asked members to share their thoughts on the Saturday, January 24, 2023, public forum that was held on Zoom. Member Jennifer Gilbert stressed the importance that if the Charter Review members were going to meet with one ward, it would be important to meet with all wards. The Chair, Kathleen Born agreed and shared that it is good to broaden the Charter Review outreach to as many groups and community members as possible.

Member Kai Long shared that she and member Patrick Magee had interviewed former Mayor and City Council member David Maher and offered comments on what was discussed during the interview. Kai Long noted that she had also interviewed former City Manager Robert Healy and urged other members of the Committee to watch the interview to get his perspective.

Anna Corning shared that she is working on a draft project timeline to help categorize and add goals to future meetings and did a brief overview of what Committee members can look forward to at the upcoming meetings. She asked for the members to start thinking about making a tentative decision on form of government so the Committee can start moving forward.

Members of the Committee offered comments on Mayor versus City Manager form of government and how moving forward the Committee could possibly look at other options besides Mayor versus City Manager. One suggestion was looking at structures within the executive branch and having a document that would be able to summarize the different concepts and would be able to provide pros and cons of different forms of government.

Member Nikolas Bowie noted that having a chart or document on how Councils in Massachusetts oversee their executives would be helpful.

Anna Corning shared that the next meeting will be held on February 28, 2023 and will include a group of Mayors and Managers from different municipalities to speak to the Charter Review Committee members.

Member Kai Long asked if the Committee could possibly get more information from Department Heads or other staff on how they feel about a City Manager form of government, to get a more honest point of view.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:35p.m.

The Charter Review Committee received seven written communications, Attachments A-G Attachment H – Memorandum from the Collins Center to the Charter Review Committee

Clerk's Note: The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/441?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=0e93353afbb7a0e6697b7df30b769404