

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE
CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 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, March 28, 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 – Absent*

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Present

Nikolas Bowie – Absent*

Kevin Chen – Present

Max Clermont – Present

Jennifer Gilbert – Present

Kai Long – Absent*

Patrick Magee – Present

Mina Makarious – Absent*

Lisa Peterson – Present

Ellen Shachter – Present

Susan Shell – Present

Jim Stockard – Present

Kathleen Born – Present

Present – 11, Absent – 4. Quorum established.

***Members Jessica DeJesus Acevedo and Kai Long were marked present at 5:37p.m.**

***Member Nikolas Bowie was marked present at 5:35p.m.**

***Member Mina Makarious was marked present at 6:30p.m.**

The Chair, Kathleen Born recognized member Ellen Schachter who made a motion to adopt the meeting minutes from February 28, 2023, and March 14, 2023. The motion was seconded by member Lisa Peterson.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the role.

Kaleb Abebe – Yes

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Absent

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Yes

Nikolas Bowie – Yes

Kevin Chen – Yes

Max Clermont – Yes

Jennifer Gilbert – Yes

Kai Long – Absent

Patrick Magee – Yes

Mina Makarious – Absent

Lisa Peterson – Yes

Ellen Shachter – Yes

Susan Shell – Yes

Jim Stockard – Yes

Kathleen Born – Yes

Yes – 12, No – 0, Absent – 3. Motion passed.

The Chair, Kathleen Born recognized member Jim Stockard who made a motion to adopt communications from Committee Members and the public. The motion was seconded by member Mosammat Faria Afreen.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the role.

Kaleb Abebe – Yes

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Yes

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Yes

Nikolas Bowie – Yes

Kevin Chen – Yes

Max Clermont – Yes

Jennifer Gilbert – Yes

Kai Long – Yes

Patrick Magee – Yes

Mina Makarious – Absent

Lisa Peterson – Yes

Ellen Shachter – Yes

Susan Shell – Yes

Jim Stockard – Yes

Kathleen Born – Yes

Yes – 14, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

The Chair, Kathleen Born opened public comment.

Liz Speakman spoke in support of keeping the same form of government that the City has had with a strong City Manager and believes that a strong Mayor would be risky.

Marilee Meyer shared they do not want to see more power from the Council and asked that the current system stays in place.

Valerie Bonds supported the same comments made by previous speakers and shared the City Council is not ready for a four year term.

Stephen Cellucci thanked the Committee for taking time to discuss the future of the City and spoke in support of a strong Mayor.

Jesse Baer spoke in favor of a strong Mayor and shared that politics is democracy and politics is under a threat and this is not the time to be moving away from politics.

Suzanne Blier spoke in favor of keeping the City Manager for now to see how the new City Manager is in his new role. She offered suggestions around the possibility of residents voting for the Mayor during Council elections.

Robert Winters offered many suggestions on updating and reformatting the current Charter and shared that giving the Election Commission more flexibility in some of the ways things are done would be beneficial.

Heather Hoffman offered comments around proportional representation and shared that done correctly, politics is the art of getting somewhere by bringing people together.

James Williamson shared a quote from Niccolo Machiavelli and would like to see a shift of power where citizens have input in decisions that are made and participate in the decisions that effect their lives.

Ilan Levy shared it is important for residents to have a clear understanding of the actual consequences of the form of government that the City will be using and voices of the people need to be heard in the final decisions that are made.

Anna Corning, Project Manager, introduced Elizabeth Corbo and Michael Ward from the Collins Center who gave an overview of their chart titled “Menu of Forms of Government with Example Options for Modifications” (Attachment A). After their presentation they made themselves available to Committee Members to respond to any questions or concerns.

Member Kai Long offered comments around strong Mayor and Manager and shared that the possibility of modifying and working on what government the City already has could be beneficial.

Member Mina Makarious noted that they agree with comments that were made by Kai Long and if the Committee decides to keep the City Manager he would like to see the Council and the public be more involved with the approach of hiring a new City Manager.

Member Nikolas Bowie shared he was in favor of switching to a strong Mayor system and realizing how much Massachusetts State Law puts into the budgetary process is a key factor that helped him lean towards a strong Mayor.

Member Lisa Peterson shared that she believes that the current system works very well but could use some improvement. Lisa Peterson noted that a directly elected Mayor is putting a lot of power to one person versus having a City Council that would require a vote of five people to make decisions within the City. Member Peterson shared that mutually agreeable goals are needed between the Council and Manager to make progress.

Member Jim Stockard offered comments and shared that the Charter Review Committee should not want to change the Charter just for the sake of change, but there are improvements in the current Charter the Committee can make moving forward. He shared that he likes the idea of keeping the current government system, noting that the City Manager is held accountable by the City Council. Jim Stockard also agreed with statements made by member Nikolas Bowie around the budget process and shared that the City Council should have more input and accountability with the budget.

Member Susan Shell shared that they agreed with comments made by member Jim Stockard. She shared that she is reluctant to change things radically without more time to deliberate and noted that maybe this is not the best time to go with a strong Mayor but feels most of the changes that will happen will be at the level of the City Council.

Member Jennifer Gilbert encouraged all members to speak on the topic of form of government if they feel comfortable. They shared that they are leaning towards a strong Mayor government and offered comments on why they are leaning that way, noting that it is hard to have a nonelected official be the voice of the City in regards to the budget and representing the City regionally.

Member Kevin Chen shared that they appreciate hearing comments from fellow Committee members and from listening to the conversation at the meeting, they are leaning towards strong Mayor only if there is a Chief Administrative and Finance Officer (CAFO) role partnered with a Mayor. Kevin Chen noted that having a Mayor will help bring accountability and transparency to the City, which is what many residents and Committee members have voiced in their concerns, and a CAFO will allow a manager type role that can help the City go in the right direction.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen shared that if the Committee decides to keep the current form of government one thing they would like to see changed would be towards the budget, and noted giving the responsibility of the budget to the elected officials is important.

Member Patrick Magee agrees with comments made around the budget process and shared it would be helpful to look at past budgets and compare them to municipalities that have a strong Mayor to see where Cambridge's budget stands in comparison to those to see if members are happy with that, or what the difference would be under different circumstances. He shared that there could be the possibility of strong Mayor form of government not being progressive enough and noted there is a balance of having a collective group deciding who the City Manager is could be a good safety net.

Member Kaleb Abebe shared he had similar thoughts to Patrick Magee to compare budgetary spending with other municipalities and how it relates to Cambridge. Kaleb Abebe offered comments around the budget and noted that more input from elected officials and the City

Council, is more of a high priority for him while also maintaining the Council-Manager relationship.

Member Jessica DeJesus Acevedo shared that she is apprehensive towards elected voting due to the lack of representation of minorities. She offered comments around the budget and the struggles of being a small business owner and resident in Cambridge, but noted she was in favor of a City Manager structure because she believes that role is more accountable. She shared suggestions around terms and noted that a four-year term would be more beneficial for the Council and the City to accomplish goals.

Member Max Clermont noted that he was in favor of a strong Manager and Council form of government and shared that there is more of a role that the Mayor could play as a member of the Council and with the City Manager.

The Chair, Kathleen Born shared that it has been very difficult to decide on the form of government and shared she is not ready to move away from a City Manager form of government. She agrees there could be changes made in the Charter and a more efficient way to elect a Mayor to Chair the City Council.

Member Kai Long shared that having nine elected leaders and helping them figure out how to work together would be extremely beneficial and a good goal for the Committee to work together towards.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen noted that the rise of costs in the City has played a role in how many people who identify as a minority vote in Cambridge and shared that the idea of having people who may not live in Cambridge, but work in Cambridge, vote as well, which could be a benefit regarding the increase of voter turnout.

Member Lisa Peterson had a clarifying question about how much input the Boston City Council recently got towards the budget and how they were able to make that change. Anna Corning noted that it was a ballot question that the State gave Boston to allow new power to the Council to allow them to amend, reject, or propose line items, as long as the overall budget number did not increase.

Member Nikolas Bowie stressed the importance that when the Committee goes to the State Legislature, they should approach the process from the perspective that the Charter is the vehicle to push through the legislature the changes the people of Cambridge want.

Member Susan Shell shared it is useful to think about the residents of Cambridge who will be here in twenty years, and noted that decisions made today may influence what the demographic of the city is in the future.

Anna Corning noted that at the next Charter Review Committee meeting she would like to finish the conversation and take a working consensus vote on the form of government.

The Chair, Kathleen Born extended the meeting by fifteen minutes, no vote was taken.

Member Jennifer Gilbert shared she looks forward to more conversation to help flush out and get a better consensus on form of government.

Member Mina Makarios offered comments regarding how the Committee will vote next week on the form of government.

Member Kai Long had a clarifying question on how the Charter can make the City Council and City Council- Manager relationship more accountable and if a Mayor-Council would be an easier relationship to build towards accountability. Anna Corning noted that with a Mayor system, they are less accountable to the City Council because they do not have to report to the City Council, whereas the City Manager does have to report to the City Council.

The Chair, Kathleen Born shared that she would like more information from the Collins Center regarding what a tight goal setting process would look like to tie goals to the budget. She also shared that understanding more about the State Legislative process and other Charters submitting Home Rule petitions would be helpful moving forward. Anna Corning and Elizabeth Corbo were available to respond and shared that there are many methods to use towards goal setting.

Member Kevin Chen had a clarifying question regarding the possibility of voters being able to appoint and remove a City Manager. Elizabeth Corbo provided answers, sharing that there is the possibility of having a form of a citizen free petition.

Member Jim Stockard shared it is important to communicate with State Representatives and Legislators sooner so they are on the same page and have an understanding of what the Committee is trying to address.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen thanked the Collins Center for their chart and shared a table that represents the roles of the Manager and CAFO with a column on how they could be kept accountable by the Council and the voters would be helpful. Anna Corning shared that a CAFO role is person who is working for the Mayor and acts as a department head.

Anna Corning thanked everyone for participating and believes it was a very productive meeting.

The Charter Review Committee adjourned at approximately 8:00p.m.