

MINUTES OF THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

The Cambridge Charter Review Committee held a meeting on Tuesday, December 6, 2022. 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, the Clerk called the roll.

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

Present – 14 Absent – 1. Quorum established.

Chair Born opened the meeting with the Adoption of the Minutes of the November 8, 2022, meeting and recognized a motion from member Jim Stockard and seconded by member Patrick Magee.

Kaled 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 Makarios – Absent
Lisa Peterson – Yes
Ellen Shachter – Yes
Susan Shell – Yes
Jim Stockard – Yes
Kathleen Born, Chair - Yes

Yes – 14 No – 0 Absent – 1. Motion passes.

The Chair noted that there was one Communication from member Jessica Acevedo. The Chair recognized a motion from member Kevin Chen and seconded by member Kai Long to place the Communication on file.

Kaled 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 Makarios – Absent
Lisa Peterson – Yes
Ellen Shachter – Yes
Susan Shell – Yes
Jim Stockard – Yes
Kathleen Born, Chair - Yes

Yes – 14 No – 0 Absent – 1. Motion passes.

Anna Corning introduced the Committee Values Statement Proposal that the writing team has been working on.

Members Lisa Peterson and Mosammat Faria Afreen thanked the writing team and had clarifying questions with some parts of the statement and suggestions for improvement. Discussion between members took place on small changes to be made to the Values Statement.

Anna Corning asked members to vote fist to five on voting to take action and accept the Committee Value Statement.

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

Fourteen members recorded voting five and one member recorded as absent.

Michael Ward from the Collins Center did an overview of the Plan E Charter. They also did a detailed review of an Exemplar Charter, which included preamble, incorporation; short title; definitions, legislative branch, executive branch, school committee, administrative organization, financial procedures, elections, citizen participation mechanisms, general provisions, and transition provisions. They noted that the legislative branch is where the Charter begins to define division of powers between the executive and legislative branch, which all depends on what the Committee decides on form of government.

Member Susan Shell questioned what the procedure is when a change in the Charter is put into effect and clarification on how the Charter Review Committee was set up. Michael Ward responded and provided information on what the process would be for the Charter Review Committee.

Member Kaleb Abebe had a clarifying question on amending current charter versus drafting new language. Michael Ward responded with pros and cons of doing each. Anna Corning also noted that the Committee would not be starting from scratch if new language was drafted and would be able to use existing text from other sources.

Member Jennifer Gilbert noted that Charter Committee’s focus is to have the government be more accessible. They noted it could be a good idea to start from scratch to reach common goals, create a more readable Charter, and the opportunity for all people to have power within the government.

There was discussion between members Mosammat Faria Afreen, Ellen Shachter, and Lisa Peterson on the positive effects of drafting new language and that change could be good, noting that this would be a good opportunity for the Charter.

Anna Corning asked members to vote fist to five on drafting new text for the Plan E Charter.

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

Fourteen members recorded voting five and one member recorded as absent.

The next topic that Anna Corning introduced was to review the forms of government.

Michael Ward did a quick overview of the basic forms of government in Massachusetts, which included examples from both City and Town governments. Noting that Cambridge uses City form of government that has the option to use a Mayoral form (elected Mayor leads executive branch) or Council- Manager form (appointed Manager leads executive branch). They opened it up to the Committee, looking for what questions members had and what information members need to know so the Committee can start moving forward.

Member Susan Shell asked if there was any general information, pros and cons, or any thought out research that members could look at to help with decision making. Michael Ward responded that it is something the Collins Center could provide. Anna Corning noted that they have also put resources on the Charter Review website about charter and charter review.

Member Ellen Shachter questioned if the City Council or department heads from the city in the Executive branches would be able to give feedback on their thoughts. They also questioned if a survey is possible, to which Michael Ward responded noting that surveys have been done in the past. Michael suggested that it could be possible to get a panel of Mayors, Managers, and Councillors from other cities to hear their perspectives. Anna Corning mentioned the possibility of getting a list of interviewees that could include previous mayors, managers, and department heads from the City of Cambridge, to gather their thoughts and feedback.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen noted that they would be interested in seeing how cities in other countries are run. They noted that they are interested in seeing the Charter create a form of government which welcomes community participation.

Member Jennifer Gilbert had comments on community participation and elections and how the Charter can focus on the good of both Mayor and Manager government.

Member Nikolas Bowie noted they would like to see what other forms of government look like besides the two presented and the importance of expanding government to look beyond the City of Cambridge and Massachusetts.

Member Kai Long noted they liked the idea of having both a Mayor and City Council and noted they agreed with the idea of looking at other forms of government in other countries to help make our politics not dependent on personality versus what they are going to do if elected.

Member Max Clermont made comments on a Town Manager and town meetings, and how the City could incorporate something similar to a town meeting in city government because of the positive benefits.

Member Lisa Peterson questioned what the accountability should look like for Mayors and City Managers, what form of resident involvement is best to hold them to their accountability and if there are any additional ways accountability can be built into the system.

Michael Ward offered final comments and answered some questions that were brought to their attention during discussion with members.

Member Jim Stockard asked for guidance from Michael Ward on good public bodies.

Chair Kathleen Born questioned how to further define the interactions between the City Council and City Manager and if the budgeting process would be able to tie policies together.

Kevin Chen noted members have made a lot of good points and have raised interesting questions. They brought up the possibility of using citizen juries.

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo asked for clarifying comments on what the writing process would look like for drafting a new Plan E. They asked for more data on cost of elections and campaigns, and how this reflects the representation and leadership in Cambridge.

Anna Corning opened Public Comment.

Public Comment

John Hawkinson spoke on the City Manager's 90 Day Report.

Jameson Quinn spoke on discussions from today's meeting.

Adjournment at approximately 7:53p.m.