



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Paul Toner
City Councillor

May 1, 2024

To Members of the Cambridge City Council:

I am writing to inform you that we will be holding our first Government Operations and Planning Committee meeting to discuss the Charter Review process on Wednesday June 5th from 3:00 to 5:00 PM.

We will begin with public comment followed by a discussion of the questions submitted by Councillors about the Charter Review Committees recommendations. We will then discuss a possible process and timeline for moving forward with any recommendations to be approved by the full City Council.

Attached is a copy of a list of key decisions that we will need to make, and the questions submitted by the City Council for discussion with the City Solicitor, Clerk and Elections Commissioner.

Thank you for your patience.

Sincerely,

Paul Toner
Chair, Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee

Questions for City Clerk, Election Commission Executive Director, City Solicitor regarding Charter Review Recommendations and Process

Procedural Items to be discussed.

1. Meetings with solicitor/election commissioner/clerk/ other experts to review process and Council questions.
2. How many meetings, forums, public outreach, etc.?
3. Set up timeline for putting on ballot.
4. Establish guidelines for processing recommendations (i.e. Will we consider items not supported by a 2/3rds recommendation as required by the ordinance? Will we require a majority vote or 2/3rds vote of council to advance a recommendation?)

Legislative and Balloting Process

1. The City Council reviews and votes on recommendations.
2. The City Council approves a home rule petition to forward to legislature.
3. The Legislature reviews and approves or rejects home rule petition.
4. If approved by the Legislature, forwarded to the Governor
5. Signed by the Governor
6. Placed on ballot before the voters.

Questions/Issues to Review

1. Does everything need to go on the ballot? If it's just ministerial or modernizing and editing language, must it still go to ballot?
2. Will the Council only be reviewing recommendations that had at least a 2/3rds vote from Charter Review as per the Ordinance Committee?
3. If yes to #2, the first decision is whether or not to change from the City manager form of government to a strong Mayor form of government. Can we send both versions to the State House for approval to put before the voters? Would they consider both in tandem or are we essentially forced to make the decision as a council without putting it to the ballot?
4. Can the State House review and approve recommendations ***a la carte or must they vote the whole proposal up or down?***
5. Will the Council go forward with recommendations as a whole package or separate HR Petitions on different recommendations?
6. Should we be moving forward in phases? Move forward with legal, editorial, format changes first and then at a later date consider the more substantial recommendations?

7. Should we be adding language to acknowledge other prior changes in city government (Traffic Board, Licensing Commission, Cambridge Health alliance, Cambridge Housing Authority, etc.) even if just by reference?
8. What is the legislative history of requests to allow voting for 16- and 17-year-olds in municipalities at the State House? What are the pros and cons of including?
9. What is the history of requests to allow voting for non US citizen residents to vote in municipalities at the State House? What are the pros and cons of including?
10. What is the history of requests to move municipal elections to even years at the State House/Secretary of State's Office?
11. How difficult would it be for the election commission to change council elections to align with state and national elections? What are the pros and cons of including?
12. Could we put language in the charter that would go into effect upon action of the state house for items that require passage of state legislation? (ex: "The City of Cambridge shall allow voting by 16 and 17 year-olds. This shall go into effect upon passage of enabling legislation by the Massachusetts state legislature.")
13. Would PR still 'work' if we moved council elections to align with state and national elections? OR do we have to move to a popular vote approach?
14. What does it mean to change the tabulation method and what would we change it to? How is it decided what tabulation method to use?
15. Can the solicitor identify areas of conflict between the existing charter, state requirements and the city council rules, if any. Public comment comes to mind?
16. If we move to a resident assembly how are the persons selected? Elected? Who does this? Elected? Appointed by City Manager?
17. Once we complete our process and send Home Rule Petition, how long will it take for the state to approve or not approve?
18. Do charter questions have to be put on the ballot in a municipal election year or could they be put on the ballot during a special election or during an even numbered year?
19. When would we need to send proposed questions to the State Legislature for review to have them on the November 2025 ballot?