

Town of Durham
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting
Minutes
March 27, 2006

1. Call to Order.

The Charter Revision Commission (CRC) met at the Temporary Town Hall located at 350 Main Street on Monday, March 27, 2006. Chairman McLaughlin called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Members Present: John Corona, Laura Francis, Martin French, Carol Kleeman, Mark McLaughlin, Ron Melnik, Pat Murawski, Alice Tucker, Betty Wakeman Long.

Also Present: Larry Macala

Motion by John Corona, seconded by Martin French to accept agenda as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Public Comments.

Larry Macala asked the commission if the timeline and recommendations made by the Board of Selectmen would be available at the Public Hearing scheduled for March 30, 2006. He also expressed his concern that the commission members might feel pressured by the short timeline. He asked that there be thoughtful consideration when making changes to Durham's Charter. This is an historic event and shouldn't be rushed. Mr. Macala stated that the revisions could be put on the November 2007 ballot rather than November 2006.

Mr. Macala likes the Town Meeting form of government and the way issues are handled now. He does not want to see major changes in this regard and is concerned that with the commission meeting every week there will be little time for the members to reflect on the validity of proposed changes.

Chairman McLaughlin responded on behalf of the commission and assured Mr. Macala that the commission is aware of the momentous responsibility in making changes to the town's charter. The commission does not feel pressured by the Board of Selectmen suggestions or timeline and will move forward in a thoughtful and deliberative manner. Laura Francis added state statute is very specific regarding charter changes and allows up to sixteen months before action is required.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Ron Melnik, seconded by Laura Francis to approve minutes of March 20, 2006 with one correction to commission member name: Betty Wakeman Long. Ayes: John Corona, Laura Francis, Martin French, Mark McLaughlin, Ron Melnik, Pat Murawski, Alice Tucker. Abstain: Carol Kleeman, Betty Wakeman Long.

3. Timeline

Alice Tucker asked why the goal is to have the charter revision question on this November's election. There is nothing in the charge given to this commission about having this ready for

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the November election. Chairman McLaughlin replied this will need to be clarified with the Board of Selectmen.

Laura Francis added she believes the board of selectmen are concerned with two issues: 1) the expense of a special election (referendum) just for this question; including it on the November ballot would save the town money, and 2) fifteen percent turnout of registered voters is required in order to adopt the revised charter. The turn out for a state election is usually greater than that of a local election, therefore the preference for this November election.

There was much discussion by the members as to whether this timeline is workable. Ron Melnik stated the commission really won't know if the timeline is feasible until they start working on the changes. Chairman McLaughlin added the commission has the option of approaching the Board of Selectmen if it looks like the timeline is unreasonable.

Question asked, "What is the drop dead date" for the charter changes to be completed. Laura answered that September 22nd is the deadline to have the referendum question submitted to the Secretary of State's office. If CRC does not finalize the charter changes by then, this item will not be voted on in the November 2006 election. Prior to this September date the Board of Selectmen need to accept or reject the recommendations of this commission at its August 7th meeting. If rejected at that meeting the question would not appear on the November ballot

Motion by Betty Wakeman Long, seconded by Ron Melnik to provisional acceptance of the timeline allowing that changes may need to be made. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Format/Preparation: Public Hearing, March 30, 2006

General discussion ensued regarding the Public Hearing on Thursday, March 30th. Chairman McLaughlin will introduce the commission members, explain the process and provide handouts. It was agreed that this hearing would be more a gathering of input from the public as there is really nothing to present yet to the public. The commission will provide copies of the following to the public: 1) provisional timeline, 2) Board of Selectmen suggestions; 3) suggestion form, and 4) charter.

The following people will be responsible for providing information/handouts for the Public Hearing:

1. Laura will prepare a one-page timeline.
2. Alice will draft a suggestion form to be available at the Public Hearing, Library, Town Hall and town website.
3. Laura will put the suggestion form on the town's website. After some discussion it was agreed that Laura will set up an email address on the town's website for people to submit suggestions. The commission agreed on the email address of crc@townofdurhamct.org. Laura reviewed FOI concerns regarding emails. These are to be considered public documents and therefore should be saved.
4. Kim will make nameplates and two suggestion boxes to be located in the Library and Town Hall.
5. Martin will bring copies of the Charter.
6. Mark will put together agenda for Thursday.

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The commission's paramount concern is that the public have more than one way to express their views on the charter revision process. The commission will present three ways for the public to have input at the March 30th hearing: 1) come to a meeting, 2) submit a suggestion form, or 3) send an email to crc@townofdurhamct.org.

People may want to keep their suggestions anonymous, so name will be optional, however, the following statement will be placed on the suggestion form and website:

“If the Charter Revision Commission requires clarification on your comments may they contact you? If so, please provide your email address and name.”

5. Plan of Action for Reviewing/Revising Charter: General Approach

There was much discussion as to plan of action especially regarding board and commission input. Commission members agreed to invite representatives from all boards and commissions to the April 17th meeting. This allows time for the boards and commissions to meet amongst themselves to discuss their concerns regarding charter revision and then bring those suggestions forward to the CRC. Boards and commissions also have the option of submitting a memo to the CRC if a representative is unable to attend the April 17th meeting. Laura will go through the charter and invite all concerned including the obvious newer entities not in the charter, e.g. Water Commission, LEPC, Emergency Management, Public Safety, etc. She will also check to see if the library or Strong School is available to hold this meeting.

In addition to input from the public and current board/commission members, CRC would appreciate suggestions from past board/commission members. CRC will also seek information from outside resources especially CCM to learn how other towns have handled charter revisions. The commission has collected several charters from other towns to review.

Ron Melnik expressed his concern as to when the CRC might be overstepping its bounds legally. John Corona responded that the town attorney can help in this matter. He also stated that not “everything” in town government should necessarily be in the charter.

6. Identify Critical Charter Items for Discussion/Action at Next Meeting

After some discussion commission members agreed to start with the “Low Hanging Fruit” list. Many of these are basic housekeeping items. Chairman McLaughlin volunteered to work on these and bring a summary to the next meeting for review, comment, corrections and approval by the commission.

Motion by Betty Wakeman Long, seconded by Carol Kleeman, to change the time of the April 3rd meeting to 6:30 p.m. due to the Annual Budget Hearing scheduled for 8:00 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

7. Structure of sub-committees

The commission does not have enough information to act on at this time.

8. Letter to Board Commission Chairs Soliciting Input

Laura will send a letter to all boards and commissions referenced in the town charter as well as the newer entities not included in the charter, e.g. Water Commission, LEPC, Emergency Management, Public Safety, etc.

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9. Discuss/Decide on Inviting Board/Commission Chairs

Discussion as to whether CRC members should attend all board and commission meetings or have them attend CRC meetings. As there are so many boards and commissions, some of which only meet once a month, the decision was made to invite representatives from each board and commission to attend the CRC April 17th meeting. This will give the CRC time to review suggestions from the Public Hearing as well as get some work done over the next couple of weeks. Carol Kleeman suggested that in addition to letters being sent out to the boards that an article be placed in the Town Times to this effect and announce this meeting at the upcoming Public Hearing.

10. Status of Recording Secretary

Kim Garvis was accepted by the commission as the recording secretary.

11. Provisional Agenda for Next CRC Meeting

Chairman McLaughlin will provide secretary with agenda items, which she will submit to the town clerk's office for posting. Alice Tucker felt the CRC should provide opportunity for Public Comments at every meeting. Further discussion transpired culminating in the following motion:

Motion by John Corona, seconded by Alice Tucker to provide "Public Comment" opportunity at the beginning of every meeting to a reasonable extent. Motion passed unanimously.

12. Adjourn

Chairman McLaughlin adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kimberly D. Garvis
Recording Secretary*