

Charter Review Committee
Thursday, January 19, 2023
4:00 P.M.

Members Attending: Andrew Hogeland, Chair, Anne Skinner, Jeff Strait, Bob Menicocci, Town Manager, *ex officio*. Attending via Zoom: Jeff Johnson, Mary Kennedy and Nate Buddington
Absent: Joe Bergeron

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 P.M.

1. Taking of Minutes - Mary Kennedy will take minutes.
2. Approval of Minutes of December 1, 2022.
Minutes not completed and will be voted on at the next meeting.
3. Discussion of questions for town-wide survey.

Jeff, Nate and Andy met recently and drafted a list of survey questions to send to town residents. Andy spoke with the Treasurer and if everything is ready the survey can go out in the March mailing of the tax bills, and we would pay copying costs but not postage. This will only go to homeowners, not tenants, and an effort will be made to get a list of rental addresses. Printing cost will be 14 cents a page for one page, double sided or two pages double sided for 28 cents. Tony, the IT staff member at town hall is going to see what he can do technically with this in house, or if he has to hire someone to assist so we can have the ability to cross reference and tabulate results.

Jeff Strait stated most people don't know what the charter is and would need an explanation that it sets the structure of our government. He felt it was better to ask people what they feel about the structure of town government. Also if town meeting questions do not relate to charter, we should remove them. Rank choice voting is something that could be addressed in the charter.

The Select Board currently has a committee looking at our town meeting structure. Discussion ensued about working with them to combine our questions into one survey, but making sure we get our questions in first. These are questions that anyone involved in town government would like to know the answers to.

The following survey questions garnered discussions:

Question #6, Are the questions on the bottom half necessary, as not really being charter specific and were more town service specific. Nate felt that we should have tangential questions to the Charter, from the recipient's perspective that may make it more attractive for residents to complete, and they would have a purpose in relation to response rate.

Question #7 - eliminate the words, "to the Charter".

Question #8 - Charter review schedule is an issue we need to address but doesn't need to be actually part of the Charter. This is something that we as a committee would need to address as a provision in the Charter, rather than put this in the survey. Question should be removed.

Jeff Johnson stated that one of the biggest struggles they had in creating these questions was that in hopes of educating the residents they would like to have links on everything, but knew this would take the residents too long to read up on the items before completing the survey.

Question #9 - Remove legislative council as we don't have the option because of our lower population size. Also coming up with 100 representatives for town meetings could be a difficult number to obtain.

Question #12 - Question should be changed to "How would you change or restructure the government of Williamstown", with a narrative box for respondents, rather than addressing the Charter itself. Also questions should be moved to the end of the survey.

Question #16 - The Town Manager stated the town could be implementing this by the May 2023 town meeting, so didn't know if we should be asking question if we are already doing it, pending ARPA funding. We have five weeks to finalize this and will then see where this issue is at.

Question #17- Forums are already occurring with the League of Women Voters. It's more a question of who would sponsor these forums. Maybe the question should be , "are you aware that these forums exist." This question goes with Question #19. This is something we could already do without asking about it. They could be formatted as a Zoom meeting and residents could call in with their questions.

Deb Dane, Director of Willinet (who was filming) stated that people who don't have Spectrum Cable any more but must have the internet and a device to have access to Willinet via various streaming devices. A mailing was sent to residents explaining all the options. Making a forum into a Zoom event for residents to ask questions could easily be done but comes with a lot of technical skill and issues would need to be worked out.

Question #18 - More people know what rank choice voting is, as opposed to those that know what the charter is, so taking out the detailed explanation would shorten the question. Keep it to one or two sentences and there could be a link that would explain for those that need more detail. We could ask , "Are you familiar with the concept of rank choice voting?" and "if yes, would you endorse it for Williamstown?" This would shorten it and and once we see the result we may need to address it later.

Other Survey suggestions

Nate, Jeff and Andy will come up with a simple version for a condensed survey.

We could add a section to questions # 6 to add if you have any questions or comments about town government to let us know. Also the email of Selectboard and Town Manager could be added here for residents to make comments.

Remove Questions #8 and #12. Question 16 may be irrelevant by the time we are ready with the survey.

We need to keep this survey very simple but still get as much information as possible to be useful. Also see if any of these questions are being addressed in the Master Plan survey so we don't duplicate.

The Town Manager stated that he will be meeting with the town staff on Wednesday addressing the Charter.

It was agreed to wait until April for the Rank Choice voting group to come speak with us. Once the surveys and questionnaires are out we will start talking about specific issues. In a year to provide a report and some of those issues we can start writing up now and getting all the groundwork and descriptions together. We should also be addressing housekeeping and technical issues before getting into larger issues. We are going to need to have specific legislation prepared for Town Meeting 2024. We need to have something publicly available to document committees and boards.

Deb Dane suggested that these meeting draft documents that we discuss be part of the packet on the website so they can be followed along by those watching.

Meeting adjourned at 5:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kennedy

