

NEWTON CHARTER COMMISSION
Wednesday, December 16, 2015
7:00 p.m. – City Hall – Rm. 211
MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chair Josh Krintzman, Vice Chair Rhanna Kidwell, Bryan Barash, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Brooke Lipsitt, Karen Manning, Chris Steele

Rhanna Kidwell called the meeting to order at 7:00. Bryan Barash, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Brooke Lipsitt, Karen Manning, and Chris Steele were present.

1. Approval of minutes from December 9th meeting:

Minutes were amended and approved (8-0, Krintzman absent).

2. Commission work plan

Rhanna led the Commission through the creation of the work plan, beginning with a discussion of the strategic goals. Brooke expressed concern that Objective #2 is not measurable and questioned how we can claim to have reached that goal. At this point, objective #1 can be determined with data from the Election Commission, but Objective #2 and #3 are less quantifiable. (Josh Krintzman joined the meeting at 7:10 and took over as Chair). Commissioners decided that these goals are an acknowledgement that Newton has a unique culture, but we should try to determine that we have met our goals through data when possible. Rhanna suggested that we view these objectives as a working document that can be changed and updated through the review process.

The Commission discussed the steps for a review of each Article and the details involved in each step. The work plan sets out the calendar as well as a timeline for the review of each Article. It also sets out an Article-by-Article review as well as a holistic review of the structure of government. Chris said that issues in Article 8 are somewhat more discrete and could provide the Commission with an opportunity to do a trial run of the work plan.

Howard expressed concern that we would not be able to complete the charter review in the time frame set out by law (GLM 43B). He expressed the concern that two meetings per month will not allow for a thorough review of the Articles all of which have multiple Sections. He noted the high level of resident involvement and feedback when the city is negotiating controversial issues. He thinks it is important to have a vote on revisions of each Article.

Josh said that we could have more than two meetings a month and additional public hearings in order to allow for additional public input. Commissioners noted that many of the decisions would be straightforward and would require minimal revision or deliberation.

Brooke noted that public input is important, but at some point the Commissioners need to make decisions and it is the Commission's responsibility to come up with a cohesive governmental system that works as well as or better than the current system.

After a review of Articles 8 and 11 which are more self-contained, the Commission will then discuss Articles 2, 3, and 4 holistically.

Brooke made a motion that the Commission take a straw vote on each Article as work is completed, followed by a working draft review and potential change.
Seconded by Chris. (Motion approved 8-0)

Commissioners discussed the order of the Articles for review and decided on a sequence. The order of Article review will be as follows: Articles 8, 11, 2/3/4 (conceptual/strategic), 3, 4, 2, 1, 7, 5/6, 9, 10, 12.

The Commission then discussed how the work plan of an Article review would proceed, the division of responsibilities for the steps of review, and how to move the review forward in a timely manner. It was noted that none of the individual steps of a review require deliberation so preparation work outside of a Commission meeting is in keeping with the Open Meeting Law. Brooke suggested that a consultant could move the review process forward expeditiously. The Commission identified steps that could be handed over to a consultant and which should be handled by Article review leaders. All agreed that the consultant should identify benchmark communities (with the Article review leaders) as well as collect data and research. Bryan noted that a consultant might be able to pull together data from other communities in a timely manner. Anne pointed out that the Commissioners should conduct interviews with Newton officials. The step outlining the process of gathering public input was tabled until a later time.

Jane made motion to entertain public comment at the beginning of working meetings for 20 minutes, with individual comments limited to 3 minutes.
Seconded by Bryan, (Motion approved 8-0).

Decisions about whether to have the consultant attend meetings and who would handle drafting responsibilities were tabled until a later date. Rhanna and Jane will lead the review of Article 8.

Hiring administrative support / Clerk

Jane said that she had a conversation with Ouida Young about hiring an assistant to help with clerk responsibilities for the Commission. Ouida will contact Human Resources to begin the process and Jane or Karen will follow up after hearing from Ouida.

Communications Strategy:

Karen outlined the work that has been completed to date. There is now a working website where minutes and audio of meetings, a calendar, and other information/ documentation are kept.

- Residents must subscribe to our mailing list on the website in order to receive Charter email.
- Bryan will post updates on Village 14 with Chris as a backup.
- The Commission should identify groups to reach out to for input and to make connections to the larger community.
 - The Tab has printed several articles about the work of the commission.
 - Karen presented an auto-response to send to residents who email the Commission.

Polling

The Commission discussed the objectives of, and reasons for, polling the community. Several Commissioners expressed concerns that the results of a poll may constrain the work of the Commission because the results would be public information. The Commissioners had questions about the purpose of polling and the funding so decided to table the question at this point in time.

Finances of the Commission

The Commission will need funding for a clerk assistant, a consultant when the scope of the work is established, printing and mailing of the final report, advertisements in the paper, and Mail Chimp. Brooke suggested that Josh make contact with the Mayor and Chair of Finance of the City Council to let them know about these expenses.

Josh commented that he had missed the approval of the minutes, but asked that they be amended to reflect the time at which the meeting began, who was presiding and who was present. There was no objection.

Upcoming Meeting Dates and Agenda

The next meeting of the Commission will be on January 13 at 7:00 in Room 211.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:41p.m.