

Charter Commission Minutes

Public Hearing

January 8, 2020

Members Present:

X	Bofia, Phil	X	LaLiberty, James
X	Brown, Lutie	X	Merrill, Ron
X	Burdick, Samantha	X	Nale, Tom
X	Finch, Rien	X	Payne, Julian
X	Koch, Hillary	X	Weeks, Cathy

Others Present: Michelle Payne, Jonathan Weeks, Paul Lussier, Nick Isgro, Rick Foss, Tom DePre, Maryanne Bernier, Pam Merrill, Dan Anderson, Marilyn Harmon, Mike Morris, City Solicitor Lee, City Clerk Dubois, City Manager Roy, Dan Libby.

The Public Hearing was opened order at 7:00 p.m. by Co-Chair Tom Nale. After introductions, the Co-Chair explained that speakers would be allowed three minutes to speak and asked speakers to sign the sheet at the podium, then opened the floor to public comment. Mr. Nale pointed out that the meeting schedule, agenda and minutes are being posted on the city's website.

Mr. Paul Lussier, Waterville resident for 10-12 years and former Code Enforcement Officer for the City of Waterville, stated that he talks to his neighbors and they are concerned about their taxes and that they feel a sense of helplessness. Mr. Lussier suggested that we should bring the budget to the voters, since it is done in other municipalities and is fair since all Wards are represented.

Mr. Rick Foss, Ward 5 resident, said that he feels that we should keep the Ward system, and agreed that we should bring the budget to the voters.

Ward 6 resident Tom DePre reiterated that we should keep the ward system, based on his experience with the logistics of knocking on doors as a candidate for Ward 6 City Council. Mr. DePre also suggested that we should vote on the budget.

Sharon Labbe, Ward 1 resident for 37 years, stated that we should keep the Ward system because it will cost more to run for an office if you must campaign in the whole city. Ms. Labbe said that having the Wards simplifies the choices and allows residents to get to know the candidates.

Mr. Dan Libby, Ward 4, stated that we should continue with the Ward system.

Maryanne Bernier, Ward 4 School Board member, harmonized with previous speakers to keep the Ward system because candidates get to know the people and the people know who to call when a question or concern arises. Ms. Bernier asked whether the upcoming meetings of the Charter Commission were open to the public. City Solicitor Lee said that the meetings were open to the public to attend, but not necessarily for the public to participate.

Ward 7 resident Pam Merrill reiterated that we should maintain the Ward system. Ms. Merrill questioned whether the residency requirement of three months to run for Mayor is enough and suggested that it should be at least a year in order for the person to get to know the people and the city.

Mr. Jonathan Weeks, Ward 1, stated his support for the Ward system and added that he is not in favor of at-large seats on the City Council. Mr. Weeks stated that many are not happy with taxes going up and questioned whether we were spending intelligently, adding that he would support a budget vote. Finally, Mr. Weeks agreed that it would be good to have a longer residency requirement before someone could run for office.

Ward 5 resident Ms. Marilyn Harmon said that she is a 55-year resident of Waterville and that people in Ward 5 would be upset if the Ward system was disbanded. Ms. Harmon pointed out that paying taxes is a struggle and suggested that we be careful where we are spending to reduce taxes.

Mr. Dan Anderson, Ward 5, thanked the Commission members for their time and effort and expressed his support for the Ward system because local representation is the best. Mr. Anderson agreed with previous speakers that there should be a longer residency requirement to run for office.

Nick Isgro, Ward 4, also thanked the members for their time and effort and reiterated that we should maintain the Ward system because in his experience in campaigning for Mayor throughout the entire city he saw distinct differences in each Ward. Mr. Isgro pointed out that if we add at-large seats we would shift the power away from the Wards. Isgro stated that we should keep the Mayor's position because a lot of work is done behind the scenes and this person has a different perspective from the Ward representatives. Mr. Isgro suggested that we should eliminate partisan elections and the caucus system because it creates division among the City Councilors, particularly during election cycles. Finally, Mr. Isgro recommended changing the Conflict of Interest criteria in the Charter to classify School and City employees together, in order to not allow them to vote on the budget.

Lily Wilson, Ward 3, thanked the members for their time and suggested that greater detail and specificity be put in the Charter so that all Colby voters are held to the same standard and urged respect for all voters.

City Clerk Dubois read her written testimony into the record, a copy of which is attached.

Ms. Laura Sokoloski, Ward 3, agreed with Ms. Wilson's comments and said that students want to interact in this community and thanked the members for their service.

Co-Chair Nale thanked the meeting attendees and speakers. There being no further comment, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.