

Summary of Barrington Charter Review Commission Meeting, December 6, 2023

The 2023-2024 Barrington Charter Review Commission (CRC) met on December 6 at the Barrington Middle School. This was the fourth meeting of the Commission that was formed by the Town Council to do the ten-year review of the Charter required by law. A key focus of the Council's charge for the CRC is to explore possible alternatives to the Financial Town Meeting (FTM) format for approving the Town's budget.

At this meeting, the CRC reviewed a list of suggested revisions to the Charter not related to the FTM. (The FTM will be discussed at the next two CRC meetings, December 13 and January 10.) The list of suggestions had been compiled from input from the Town Manager and departments, Town boards and commissions, the School Committee and Superintendent, public comments, and previous discussions by the CRC.

In approaching its work, the CRC weighed whether proposals were appropriate for the Charter as the Town's foundational document, versus more suitable for some other level of action (e.g., ordinance, policy, etc.). The CRC also kept in mind its goal to limit its primary recommendations to only substantive changes of the highest priority. Part of the rationale for this is that voters should not be overburdened with a long list of ballot questions during the November 2024 election (when the Charter questions will be voted on by Barrington voters). The CRC will consider recommending to the Town Council that, supplemental to the CRC's list of priority recommendations, the Council might consider introducing small sets of lower priority revisions or technical corrections to the Charter, spread out over subsequent elections, in order to "house clean" the Charter over time and not overwhelm voters at any given election.

Among the decisions of the CRC at the December 6 meeting were the following:

- Voted to reject a suggestion to add provisions to allow voters to recall the Town Manager or other Town and School officials.
- Considered recommending to the Town Council that annual performance reviews be conducted for all Town department heads and employees (to be implemented by ordinance, guidelines, and/or best practices).
- Voted to retain the Charter's residency requirement for the Town Manager position.
- Will consider adding a new section to the Charter that recognizes the duties and responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation Commission (the Charter is inconsistent as to which boards and commissions are recognized in the Charter).
- Will seek advice from the Town Solicitor regarding provisions in the Charter related to "removal for cause" of police officers (in light of the state's Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights, RI General Laws, Chapter 42-28.6).
- Will strongly encourage the Council to review the sections of the Charter related to the Fire Department to make changes that reflect the value of a permanent fire department.
- Voted to replace the minimum requirement for signatures for a citizen's petition or initiative – currently 20% of registered voters – with a set number of 300 signatures.
- Voted to change the time for filing referendum petitions from 30 days (currently) to 60 days.
- Voted to require that the Town Council appoint a citizens' commission every ten years as part of the Charter review process (this practice has been discretionary to date).
- Will seek additional information as well as advice from the Town Solicitor on a proposed Charter revision related to shoreline access.

The CRC also received a brief update on the progress of the residents' survey that asked for feedback on the FTM and the budget approval process. Findings from the survey will be reported at the December 13 CRC meeting (the survey closed on December 8).

More information can be found on the CRC website <https://www.barrington.ri.gov/452/Charter-Review-Commission>. The CRC's email address – barringtoncharterreview2023@gmail.com – can be used by residents to communicate directly with the CRC to ask questions or share ideas and comments.

The next meeting of the Barrington Charter Review Commission is on Wednesday, December 13, beginning at 6:30 P.M. at Barrington Middle School (Global Classroom, located on the second floor, in the back of the library). The meeting will be streamed live via Zoom as well (viewing only).