

**Minutes of the  
2022 SALEM NH CHARTER COMMISSION**

**Knightly Room at Salem Town Hall  
33 Geremonty Drive  
Salem NH 03079**

**Meeting #4: Public Hearing  
Wednesday, June 15, 2022**

Present: Bernard W. Campbell (Chair), Joe Sweeney (Vice-Chair), Bonnie Wright (Secretary), DJ Bettencourt, Kevin Breen, Joseph Feole, John Janigian, Donna Loranger, and Kelly Moss.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Campbell, at 7:00. Pledge of Allegiance.

This is a public hearing for public input for the citizens of Salem to give us input on the direction that they would like the charter to go.

[Per RSA 49-B:4,V: "Before issuing its preliminary report, the charter commission shall hold at least 2 public hearings, scheduled at its discretion. At least one of such hearings shall be for the purpose of receiving information, views, comments, and other pertinent material relative to its functions and at least one shall be for the purpose of explaining, in general terms, its proposed preliminary report and receiving comments on its proposal. ..."]

<https://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/III/49-B/49-B-4.htm>

There have been about 640 responses to the survey. Survey results will be made available to the public after the survey is closed on Sunday evening, after stripping out privacy info (i.e. IP addresses). The public is encouraged to complete the survey.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/salemchartercommission>

**PUBLIC HEARING SPEAKERS:**

Video: <https://www.facebook.com/sctv17/videos/810947146556983>

**Tom Linehan**, 151 Lowell Rd [Video: 6:40]

Did survey. Checks and balances are most important. We have a legislative body and governing body; to do anything major, it needs to go through both. Charter needs an Initiative petition process to create a warrant article. Things that last multiple years (i.e. contracts) should require a super majority. The people who have to pay for it should be the people who vote for it. (Anti Federalist Papers). Recall provision for checks and balances. Some form of the budget should be on the ballot because people come for the budget. Transparency. Use plain English, acronyms should not be used by all government officials.

**Mr. Janigian:** What do you consider to be the size of a supermajority?

1 **Mr. Linehan:** 2/3 or 3/5ths. Size doesn't matter. Too high and bonds will never pass.  
2 The purpose of government is to secure people's rights.

3  
4 **Matt Pierce,** 18 Sherwood Circle [Video: 15:22]

5 There aren't enough people here. People don't know what is going on. People don't  
6 know about the options, and differences between city and town governments. A  
7 subcommittee should be promoting the activities of the commission. Commissioners  
8 should go into our neighborhood to promote meetings. How was this committee  
9 formed? People are in the dark. [applause] No transparency. Take out a Facebook ad.

10 **Mr. Campbell:** Committee was formed because of Warrant Article in March. 35  
11 candidates ran in April. The process was begun by Mr. Sweeney, who brought this to  
12 town as a warrant article.

13 **Mr. Sweeney:** The process is controlled by State law. The warrant article was created  
14 by 25 signatures on a petition. There have been 635 responses to the survey and  
15 hundreds of emails were sent. Decisions are made by those who show up. It's being  
16 aired on Facebook, and broadcast live by SGTV.

17 **Ms. Moss:** Commission will come up with a proposal, which will require 60% of Salem  
18 residents to vote on in the March 2023 election. It's been on Facebook personal and  
19 town pages.

20 **Mr. Pierce:** Algorithms on Facebook are hiding posts. On the next survey ask what kind  
21 of questions you have, not what do you want.

22 **Ms. Wright:** Go to <https://www.townofsaalemnh.org/charter-commission>. There is a  
23 boatload of info there under Boards/Charter Commission. She did a post with links to  
24 the important things to review before this meeting, which was shared on numerous town  
25 Facebook groups, and can be seen if she hasn't been blocked. She is admin for The  
26 Real Salem, NH town page (a Facebook group), where many have posted about the  
27 Commission.

28 **Ms. Loranger:** We are shocked at the Survey response. People are finding it. Some of  
29 the people who clapped actually ran for this position. (Confusing!). We don't have a  
30 budget.

31 **Mr. Pierce:** Use GoFundMe. There are ways to do it. Happy to donate \$100 for a  
32 Facebook ad. Read minutes from the previous meeting; sounded as though the public is  
33 not allowed at these meetings.

34 **Mr. Campbell:** All meetings are open to the public and are televised. People can speak  
35 at the end. There are no closed meetings.

36 **Mr. Bettencourt:** Many good points. Hears frustration. Not enough bandwidth to absorb  
37 what is going on locally that impact our lives on a day-to-day basis. We all have a  
38 responsibility to talk to our neighbors to let them know what we are doing. We – the  
39 Commission -- have the responsibility to get the word out. What we do on the local level  
40 is more important than what is in the news.

1 **Gail Corcoran**, 18 Scollay Circle [Video: 30:35]

2 Appreciation. Elect by wards. (Each person as an expert for their portion of town.) Need  
3 communication and collaboration between boards (Planning, Zoning Board,  
4 Selectboard). Warrant articles need clarity in wording, and explanations of impact. For  
5 those running for office, all the way to the Governor: Do an application form, vet it for  
6 integrity. Problem: No local newspaper. 5 Facebook pages with info about the Charter  
7 Commission. It's the town's responsibility to notify those not on Facebook.

8 **Mr. Campbell:** The applications used to be the job of the press.

9  
10 **Larry Disenhof**, 31 Hawkins Glen Drive [Video: 35:35]

11 Local charities feel the effect of no newspaper. The Town needs to step up more. Other  
12 towns: How do they measure success? Has a change in form of government had a  
13 positive or negative impact? 6.5% of registered voters voted to elect the  
14 Commissioners. Absentee ballots were delayed, and not available 10 days before the  
15 election. There are structural issues here. Attendance at Town Meeting is a concern.  
16 100 people show up at Town Meeting. Who shows up gets to decide. Should a town of  
17 this size be managed by the 100 people who show up? How does Salem measure  
18 success? We've had 8 town managers in 22 years. Look at how long it took to get our  
19 schools rebuilt and build a police station and fire station on the west side of town.  
20 Something needs to be fixed.

21  
22 **Carla Billingham**, 11 Sullivan Ave [Video: 38:30]

23 Great job promoting tonight's event with limited funds and limited access to share info.  
24 Promote to the town to go to the town website. Has not done the survey, but plans to do  
25 so. Wants a Town Council, not SB2; no fewer than 7 councilors; petitions by citizens  
26 with more signatures; and wards or districts/local representation. Wants someone who  
27 knows her district and can speak for me. Master Plan to be included.

28 **Mr. Campbell:** Survey cut off is Sunday night, possibly later.

29  
30 **Harry Nelson**, 5 Cove Road Ext. [Video: 43:00]

31 North Salem near Arlington Pond area. Founding fathers: "Congress shall make no law  
32 concerning ... " to get away from a central king. Issue with PO and moving a mailbox:  
33 locals liked the proposal, but it had to go to DC to get approval. Concerned about a  
34 Council that isn't in touch with local issues. Need newspaper. Need clarification of  
35 warrant articles. Grew up in Haverhill; watched people in power who had no idea what  
36 they were doing. Liked Town Meeting. Can't count on fully competent people all the  
37 time. Council with 9 members, at least, give us a fighting chance of it. Council is too  
38 easily swayed. If we passed all of the items that come before us, he couldn't afford to  
39 live here. Not on Facebook. Couldn't find what time tonight's meeting was. When he got  
40 here, didn't know what door to come in. Need directions within building. Knows some of  
41 the Commissioners by reputation, so has a little more confidence that something might  
42 come out of this.

43 **Mr. Campbell:** Agrees that a lot of the warrant article information is confusing, but a lot  
44 of that language is mandated by State law.

45 **Mr. Nelson:** Lawyers writing for other lawyers. The general public doesn't understand  
46 the language.

1 **Ms. Wright:** There is a voting guide that explains the articles. They are available at  
2 Town Hall before the elections.

3 **Mr. Campbell:** There was a citizen's petition a few years ago to mail them, but it failed.

4 **Mr. Nelson:** It can be done electronically now.

5  
6 **Steven Goddu, 5 Candlestick Lane [Video: 48:45]**

7 Grew up in the City of Haverhill, still very connected there. Has been a resident of  
8 Salem since 1996. Salem is the greatest place. Relatively low taxes. Good balance of  
9 business and residents. We need to appreciate that the community is able to get  
10 involved and participate in town government, unlike a city. In a city, you elect people  
11 and then go away; no input. In Salem, we have lots of input. No reason to adopt a city  
12 form of government. Others agree. There will be an uproar if we propose a city. Elect  
13 Select board At Large. No need to elect Selectboard or Councilors by ward. We aren't  
14 that big. Residents of our town know all five select board members. You have five  
15 people to talk to who represent you, rather than one person. Partisan concerns. Can't  
16 go to someone who is your representative if they are of a different party, and you can't  
17 go to someone who is outside your district, because they aren't going to help you  
18 because you can't vote for them. All elections should be at large for every office. If this  
19 board recommends cities or wards, it will create an uproar. There will be an effort to  
20 stop it, and to reject it wholeheartedly. Voter apathy: They don't come out to vote  
21 because they are happy with what is happening. They came out for trash. They will  
22 come out for wards or cities. [Slight applause.] The Commission needs to focus on what  
23 is wrong. What needs to be fixed? The Executive (Town Manager) has too much power.  
24 They are only answerable to the Board of Selectman, who can only hire or fire the Town  
25 Manager. The Town Manager can do anything they want. We should replace Town  
26 Manager with a Town Administrator, and a Board who is directing the Town Admin on  
27 what they should do. A weak executive branch is more consistent with a town  
28 government. People who signed the petition did so to reduce power of the Town  
29 Executive. It's better for Salem if the Executive has a weaker position. Only 5 people on  
30 Selectboard isn't enough. Getting three people to agree is a pretty low bar to getting  
31 something done. I advocate for seven to nine members of a Town Council. More  
32 opportunity for more people who get involved and fewer things that can go wrong. They  
33 need to direct the Town Administrator. Derry and Londonderry have a similar form of  
34 government. Look at those towns. Don't lay a lot of credence in the survey. He voted  
35 three times on the Survey. It's not scientific enough. Another survey needs to be locked  
36 down more.

37 **Mr. Campbell:** Did you use more than one device? Can only respond once per IP  
38 device.

39 **Mr. Goddu:** Maybe.

40 **Mr. Campbell:** Was unable to sign in more than once on his computer

41 **Mr. Goddu:** Unable to sign in a second time on his phone. It needs to be more secure.

42 **Mr. Campbell:** It's not valid based on sample size. It's a sample size.

43 **Mr. Bettencourt:** Speakers with different views re: electing by at large or by district.  
44 Concerned about wards or districts. Our community had this discussion not long ago  
45 with a warrant article about electing State Reps by wards. Town overwhelming said no,  
46 elect State Reps at large. Voter engagement is a concern. If we create confusion, it will

1 hurt voter engagement. Wards will create confusion. Signs will create confusion: What  
2 is my ward? Create frustration: Who should I be voting for? People will give up. How  
3 would you propose that we avoid that kind of confusion and frustrate voters?  
4

5 **Betty Gay**, 10 Woodmeadow Drive [Video: 1:02:25]

6 Add 2 more people to Selectboard/Town Council. Doesn't want townspeople to lose any  
7 authority to approve budget, zoning, and warrant articles. Didn't know Voter Guide was  
8 available. Wants a forum/forums on warrant articles before Town meeting, for  
9 petitioners to promote, and those who are against talk about why they oppose. We  
10 should have an electronic newspaper. Not for free.

11 **Ms. Moss:** How would a forum differ from Town Meeting?

12 **Ms. Gay:** Need to do homework before going to Town Meeting to be better prepared,  
13 better questions.

14 **Mr. Campbell:** Spoke to Susan McLoughlin. SGTV does a candidate's night, but he has  
15 encouraged them to do an evening on the Warrant Articles.

16 **Ms. Wright:** There were forums/presentations on the proposed fire station and on the  
17 charter commission, so some of the key topics were covered by SGTV.

18 **Mr. Campbell:** They need to be done more systematically. We will pass that request  
19 along.  
20

21 **Brian Thornock**, 5 Brookdale Rd [Video: 1:08:00]

22 The survey was critical, but it missed the mark. Instead of asking people what they  
23 think, it should have asked what they value? I value having my voice heard. Wants  
24 deliberative session to debate warrant articles, debate budget, debate the issues at  
25 hand. We are the legislature, not the Select Board. People aren't informed; they don't  
26 know the issues. The Town does a very poor job getting info out, but it's not up to this  
27 board to fix. Please review Bow NH: they had a Charter Commission exploratory  
28 committee. What questions did they ask the town? It was about what they needed in  
29 their government. Why did enough people vote to form this Commission? What are the  
30 issues? You can't solve a problem if you don't know what the problem is. Last charter  
31 commission failed because the deliberative session was removed. It's not factually  
32 accurate that if 100 people show up, then 100 people get to make the decisions. You  
33 can change some features in the articles, bring dollar value down to \$0, increase the  
34 dollar value up, but can't change the purpose of the warrant article. We need our voices  
35 heard by electing our selectmen, but more importantly, make decisions that legislators  
36 get to make. The information needs to be available long before the deliberative  
37 sessions, so we know what to argue. We can't come prepared if we don't know the  
38 answers. There aren't many options that will be approved by the State that will let our  
39 voices be heard. If SB2 isn't the model we go with, what is included or what is not  
40 included for the power of the people, is important.

41 **Mr. Janigian:** Do you like Bow's charter?

42 **Mr. Thornock:** Bow's charter goes back to the 1700's. Town put together a special  
43 committee to determine whether they needed a warrant to have the Charter  
44 Commission. They are relatively small, around 10 thousand residents. I don't know what  
45 the outcome was, but they went to the town to ask questions so the committee knew

1 what the town valued. A lot of times, people don't know what the options are. If you ask  
2 them what they want, they will tell you, but what matters is what they value.

3 **Mr. Janigian:** Some people have said they want the same type of government, but  
4 increase the select board to seven. SB2 cannot go above five selectmen. If we go to  
5 seven or nine as many have suggested, we will have to go to a town council. Even if we  
6 go to a Town Council, there are many varieties of a Town Council, from a weak form,  
7 where we would still have a budget committee, a zoning board, etc. to a strong form,  
8 where the Council has all of the power in those nine members.

9 **Mr. Thornock:** Why do we need more councilors? Keeps SB2 model. If you must go up  
10 to nine people, you can still retain the SB2 model, without taking away my ability to be  
11 the legislature.

12 **Mr. Bettencourt:** Representation is important. Value of more than 5 people making  
13 decisions. Currently, decisions are made by THREE people who make up the majority.  
14 Yes, there are checks and balances with the deliberative session and go in to vote in  
15 March. Can we add more seats at the table without losing what we have now?

16 **Mr. Campbell:** Salem is the largest community, by far, to have an SB2 form of  
17 government. We have over 30,000 residents. The next largest community has 12K  
18 residents.

19  
20 **Jaime Thornock, 5 Brookdale Rd [Video: 1:18:45]**

21 Watched Ms. Wrights "hotwash" (recap) of the meeting with the town presentations.  
22 One town said, "What problems are we trying to fix?" Focus on those answers. We  
23 might not need to make major adjustments if we can solve our problems at a lower  
24 level. We don't have a form of government problem, we have a messaging problem. A  
25 lot of people have given up on social media. Social media is nasty. Lack of a paper is an  
26 issue. People who have given up on the internet don't feel they can trust what they see  
27 or hear. Need to get those people informed. It's about apathy. "If you can't have the  
28 people want to get involved because they don't know that they need to be involved,  
29 you're never gonna get ... It doesn't matter if you change our form of government, you  
30 know, they still aren't going to come out and vote." We don't have enough time.  
31 We rely on social media too much. Explore some old-school methods of  
32 communication. When you bring a warrant, you need to explain it. Fight for it. Give  
33 people the info they need. More than one day. People come to the deliberative session  
34 to fight for their warrant article, and then leave. Try to get people involved. Explain  
35 warrant articles with details. Don't treat people as if they are stupid; show respect,  
36 people's opinions matter. Do not go with a city form of government, people won't matter  
37 as much. Ms. Wright said we need to trust our government. Scary to be asked to trust  
38 even our local government. At a select board meeting, a member asked if we could use  
39 money for something the people had said they don't want. Don't throw away our voices.  
40 Listen to the people.

41  
42 **Keith Stramaglia, 12 Carrol Ave [Video: 1:25:52]**

43 We don't need aldermen. As a selectman, I hear from people all over town. Don't need  
44 wards. There is a lack of communication. Make up fliers, send to people's home. Listen  
45 to the people. They have the final say. Do what they want you to do.

1 **Ms. Wright:** Is the town willing to give us a budget?

2 **Mr. Stramaglia:** Attend a select board meeting, and ask.

3  
4 **Jeff Hatch, 35 Royal Circle [Video: 1:29:43]**

5 Vetting of candidates by the town happens only if the candidate is appointed, not  
6 elected. Major problems in Salem is people's participation and communication. Are  
7 those two problems caused by the form of government? If not, stop discussion about  
8 changing the form of government. How do we improve the communication flow between  
9 members of the boards, the boards themselves, and voters of the town? Improve the  
10 communication process, and participation will grow. The town now depends on the  
11 people to log onto the website, attend a meeting or watch a meeting. Get people to sign  
12 up for an automatic email. The school sends out information, so the town has the  
13 capability.

14 **Mr. Campbell:** The Assistant Town Manager says about 300 people have signed up for  
15 Town Hall Times.

16 **Mr. Hatch:** It's a communication issue between the Board of Selectmen and the people.  
17 Contact VFW, American Legion or Lake Associations to add to Town Hall Times. If a  
18 new charter doesn't improve communications, we shouldn't be discussing it.

19  
20 **Daryl Abbas, 34 South Shore Road [Video: 1:34:35]**

21 District lines and wards lost overwhelming for the purpose of electing State Reps 3  
22 years ago. When a citizen puts in a warrant article, they need to campaign to promote it.  
23 Do not recommend a city. Towns have non-partisan elections. Cities are partisan.,  
24 divided, and bring in outside money.

25  
26 **Bob Gibbs, 8 Joyce Heard Ave [Video 1:37:20]**

27 Wants term limits.

28 **Mr. Campbell:** Term limits are unconstitutional in the State of NH to impose term limits.

29 **Mr. Gibbs:** Selectmen are volunteers. The average Mayor's salary is \$101,542. The  
30 average City Councilor is paid \$35,300. He is the sole reporter for Salem for the  
31 Windham Independent, a newspaper that has 500 copies sent to Salem. Let him know if  
32 we want him to share information.

33  
34 **Tom Linehan, 151 Lowell Rd (2<sup>nd</sup> comment) [Video: 1:39:17]**

35 The state dictates what the town can do, and what their powers are. Some are limited,  
36 some are broad. Recommends 300-page PDF "Knowing the Territory" by NH Municipal  
37 Association. If you want to get a lot of people at Town Meeting, have the Selectmen put  
38 in something about the dump. [[https://www.nhmunicipal.org/product/knowning-territory-](https://www.nhmunicipal.org/product/knowning-territory-overview-selected-topics-municipal-law-nh-local-officials-2022)  
39 [overview-selected-topics-municipal-law-nh-local-officials-2022](https://www.nhmunicipal.org/product/knowning-territory-overview-selected-topics-municipal-law-nh-local-officials-2022)]

40  
41 **Gail Corcoran, 18 Scollay Circle (2<sup>nd</sup> comment) [Video: 1:41:23]**

42 Praise to Bonnie Wright. The Town should have a social media site. Town website  
43 needs to be updated. There has been a delay in the election information. Special  
44 interests are bringing in warrant articles. Wants 100 signatures on Warrant articles.  
45 Aldermen/Councilors with seven to nine members is ideal. They can become experts in  
46 different things such as water or sewer, buildings, and schools. The website needs to be

clearer. Phone numbers aren't available for select board members. Same thing for other boards. We get two tax bills and four utility bills – six opportunities every year. Insert letter in those bills. We shouldn't have to sign up for info from the town, the town should provide it.

**Mr. Campbell:** Bring that suggestion to the selectboard. The website is managed by one person. Get 25 signatures to have a warrant article to hire a web manager.

**Ms. Loranger:** There was money allocated in 2022 to bring some of our IT up to speed.

**Jaime Thornock**, 5 Brookdale Rd (2<sup>nd</sup> comment) [1:46:38]

A big issue is scheduling meetings and voting, so push deliberative session to March, vote in April. Election for Charter Commission should not have been on Spring Break.

**Mr. Campbell:** That was done on purpose, so they wouldn't have to close school for the day.

**Ms. Thornock:** We lost votes because families were away.

**Ms. Loranger and Mr. Sweeney:** Election of commissioner must take place 45-60 days from the election. There were 2 weeks that we could have the election, spring break or the week after.

**Ms. Moss:** Schools weren't closed for elections other than Presidential elections.

**Mr. Campbell:** From a logistic standpoint, it's easier to hold an election when school is not in session.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thanks to those who turned out, to give us a lot to think about.

8:39: Mr. Bettencourt left.

## Old Business

starting at 8:45 p.m. [Video: 1:50:00]

## Survey

Mr. Campbell distributed preliminary feedback of the Survey for the Commissioner's information. 637 responses so far. The survey will be open through Sunday. He will not make the results public until it is complete. The final info will be available for the next meeting (Wednesday, June 29).

## Report from Mr. Bettencourt

Mr. Campbell was hoping for info from Mr. Bettencourt about the advantages of grants for cities, but he has already left for the evening.

## Website correction

The Town of Salem website shows our August 15 meeting at 7:00. It should say 10:00. Ms. Wright will follow up.



**MOTION BY Mr. Breen to adjourn.** Seconded by Ms. Loranger

**Vote:** 8-0-0

Meeting adjourned at 8:51

Minutes taken by: Bonnie Wright

Minutes Approved: Salem 2022 Charter Commission

Date: June 29, 2022

**Video:**

The video for this meeting ends at marker 1:55:13.

The video of this meeting may be viewed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/sctv17/videos/810947146556983>

<http://sctv-17.com/CablecastPublicSite/search?channel=1&query=Charter%20Commission>

Send an email to the Commissioners at:

<https://www.townofsaalemnh.org/charter-commission/webforms/contact-us>

**Charter Commission Meeting Schedule**

5<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, June 29, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

6<sup>th</sup> meeting: **Thursday**, July 7, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

7<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, July 13, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

8<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, July 20, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

9<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, July 27, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

10<sup>th</sup> meeting: **Thursday**, August 4, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

11<sup>th</sup> meeting: **Saturday**, August 13, 10 am — **PUBLIC HEARING,**

**Media Center, Salem High School**

12<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, August 17, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

13<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, August 24, 7 pm

Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall