

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."]

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.

PUBLIC HEARING SPEAKERS:

Video: <https://www.facebook.com/scty17/videos/810947146556983>

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

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

41

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 7 to 9 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 Carroll 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 (2nd 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/knowing-territory-overview-selected-topics-municipal-law-nh-local-officials-2022>]

39

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

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

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

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

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

8
9 **Jaime Thornock**, 5 Brookdale Rd (2nd comment) [1:46:38]

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

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

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

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

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

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

21
22 **Mr. Campbell:** Thanks to those who turned out, to give us a lot to think about.

23
24
25
26 8:39: Mr. Bettencourt left.

27
28
29
30 **Old Business**
31 starting at 8:45 p.m. [Video: 1:50:00]

32
33 **Survey**

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

38
39 **Report from Mr. Bettencourt**

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

42
43 **Website correction**
44 The Town of Salem website shows our August 15 meeting at 7:00. It should say 10:00.
45 Ms. Wright will follow up.

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

2 **Vote:** 8-0-0

3 Meeting adjourned at 8:51

4

5 Minutes taken by: Bonnie Wright

6

7 Minutes Approved: Salem 2022 Charter Commission

8 Date: June 29, 2022

9

10

11

12

13

14 **Video:**

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

16 The video of this meeting may be viewed at:

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

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

19

20 Send an email to the Commissioners at:

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

22

23

24 **Charter Commission Meeting Schedule**

25 5th meeting: Wednesday, June 29, 7 pm

26 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

27 6th meeting: **Thursday**, July 7, 7 pm

28 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

29 7th meeting: Wednesday, July 13, 7 pm

30 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

31 8th meeting: Wednesday, July 20, 7 pm

32 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

33 9th meeting: Wednesday, July 27, 7 pm

34 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

35 10th meeting: **Thursday**, August 4, 7 pm

36 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

37 11th meeting: **Saturday**, August 13, 10 am — **PUBLIC HEARING, Media Center, Salem High School**

38 12th meeting: Wednesday, August 17, 7 pm

39 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

40 13th meeting: Wednesday, August 24, 7 pm

41 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall