

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

**Media Center at Salem High School
44 Geremonty Drive
Salem NH 03079**

**Meeting #11: Public Hearing
Saturday, August 13, 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.**

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

Unable to attend: Kevin Breen and Kelly Moss.

This is a public hearing for the citizens of Salem to give us input on the draft charter, which can be found at:

<https://www.townofsaalemnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif7996/f/uploads/charterdraft-4aug22.pdf>

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>]

The first public hearing was held on Wednesday, June 15.

Today's meeting was called to order by Chairman Campbell, at 10:00. Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Campbell gave an introductory presentation, which can be viewed at:

https://www.townofsaalemnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif7996/f/uploads/intro_-_public_hearing_81322.pdf

Topics covered include: Background • How Does Our Town Work? • The Budget Process • Other Groups (Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Conservation Commission) • What is a Charter? • Things a Charter Can't Do • Things a Charter can do • What is the Charter Commission proposing? • Comparing current government to proposed government • Remaining Issues • Goals • Per person representation for 5 selectmen (6,018), 7 councilors (4,298) and 9 councilors (1 councilor for every 3,343 residents).

PUBLIC HEARING SPEAKERS:

Video: <https://www.facebook.com/sctv17/videos/1051790222141890>

John Sytek, 34 Town Village Drive [Video: 14:40]

In favor of a larger town council, simplified ballot. Keep it simple.

Might not have support for something more complex.

§ 3.15. Board Procedures: “Except as expressly prohibited by State Law, the Council shall adopt rules of attendance and forfeiture of office for all Town appointed boards and commissions.” I hope we can trust them.

Post-service employment. We don’t have confidential info. Restricting someone violates civil rights. Request removing this clause.

If there’s a vacancy in Town Manager: Town Council can operate as Town Manager

Ethics: Only 2 issues. Did you buy a vote? Illegal, so doesn’t need to be in charter. Did you leak info to the press? The ethics section is too many pages.

Elected at large or by district: One man, one vote. Make areas equal. Will lose the feel of the town.

Elect or appoint Planning and Zoning Boarding: We elect policy, but we should appoint technical expertise.

Claire Karibian, 56 Atkinson Rd [Video: 21:35]

Wants 9 councilors.

Wants wards, with an independent contractor to divide into wards.

Planning & Zoning: Elected by town.

Too many loopholes on the ZBA.

Selectmen transition, to keep continuity of government.

Town should interview and appoint the Town Manager. It shouldn’t be elected.

Tony Conte, 5 Gardner Ave [Video: 25:15]

New to town. Well run, well-maintained

If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

Former City Councilor in Revere.

6 by ward, 5 at large.

Ward representation: Only concerned about their neighborhood.

Number of citizens represented by councilors is irrelevant.

Smaller body is more coherent.

Some proposals make town government less democratic

Lee Alphen, 157 N. Main St [Video: 28:12]

Some positions need the expertise (Town Manager, Budget, ZBA)

No city, like small-town feel.

Small group in town have too much power.

Want all issues on warrant article.

Doesn’t like Tuscan going over the height limits.

Some people have too much power.

Opposed to the new streetlights on Rte. 28.

Keep councilors at large, not district.

Jaime Thornock, 5 Brookdale Rd [Video: 31:51 minutes]

Appreciated finding the draft charter on the town website

Agree with what has been said about wards.

We overspend continuously in government.

People are not properly represented with what we spend.

Section 3.5: Selectboard is paid \$3,000 per person.

Going from 5 to 7 or 9 Town Councilors is an exceptional amount of money.

We have nine State Reps, who are paid \$100 + mileage.

Confusion about how changes in Councilors' salaries would be made.

Mr. Campbell explained where the draft charter said that the final decision

would be voted on by the voters.

Funds going to pay, should go to informing citizens not paying them to represent us

Section 2.9 and 2.10: Campaign Finance law

This won't fix the special interest groups who live outside of town.

Appreciates the transparency, but this doesn't fix it.

We enjoy being the legislative body of the town. Selectmen are the executive body.

Article 7: Citizen Concerns, Initiative Petition, Referendum, Official Ballot Questions,

Recall: This is taking away the voice of the people.

To get a warrant on the ballot. Currently 25. Proposed is 100 registered voters.

That takes away the voice of the people. Then Town Council gets to

decide if they want to do anything.

Initiative proposal: 10% of voters in the previous election.

(Thought that was 3,000 signatures; corrected by Mr. Campbell to 300.)

Attempt to reduce the number of warrant articles takes the voice away.

Can't justify it.

Going to a Town Council isn't a bad idea. Going to a Town Council and making all of

these changes is. This won't get enough support to pass.

Gregory Davis, 28 Norwood Rd [Video: 45:35]

Appreciates the Integrity and thoughtfulness of the Commission

Wants initial slideshow made available.

Strongly supports wards, with a mixture of wards and at-large as proposed by Ms. Wright

Favors Ethics Commission. Lack of transparency has been an issue.

Minimum requirements for some of the committees. (Budget, ZBA)

Master Plan is needed. Current. Independently drafted and reviewed.

Who is responsible for monitoring and implementing?

Who/how will it be Integrated into all of the town decisions?

Silo mentality, where decisions of different boards aren't integrated

Economic Development Committee was part of that integration

Maybe have a representative from each board/committee

Ballot is too complex, too many articles

Mail out sample ballots 10 days before. Include a sunset provision, to determine if it

should expire if it isn't working.

1 **Wayne Haubner**, 1 McKinstry Circle [Video: 52:45]

2 Would like wards: Ms. Wright's compromise might be the solution

3 Trust and Transparency: Supports Ethics Committee and Campaign Finance

4 Disclosures

5 Supports Masterplan and Economic Development Committee:

7 **Tammy Page**, 4 Magnolia Ave [Video: 55:00]

8 Resident for 30 years

9 No one is listening to residents. No one cares.

10 The town is starting to look bad

11 Streetlights make our town looks bad

12 Cut down trees by Home Depot

13 Police Station is in disrepair- we need to take care of the police

14 Son went to vote for 1st time. Complained the ballot is too complex.

15 Wants sample ballot.

17 **Gail Corcoran**, 18 Scollay Circle [Video: 59:50]

18 Planning Board: Gambling building and crossroads

19 We elect people to make decisions.

20 We don't know their background

21 Warrant articles are so vague and unclear because the impact is unknown.

22 We need the background, including the presenter

23 100 minimum signatures is essential

24 The more who represent us the better. Charter Commission with 9 has been very
25 successful. We need to vet the people who are on the committees, that they
26 have the knowledge and background.

27 Supports 5 or 6 wards. Running at-large across town is more expensive than by wards.

28 A person running in a district knows those in the district, and the district knows
29 the candidate. This would encourage more people to run for office.

30 Attendance: Coming late, leaving early isn't right; run the town like a business.

31 Hire people who are qualified. Elect people who are qualified.

32 Make it easier for people to attend meetings.

33 List of town meetings has been published lately.

34 Charter Commission info has been readily available

35 Town website needs to be monitored and updated

37 **Mr. Campbell**: Credit where credit is due: Assistant Town Manager Joe Devine has
38 been posting the list of events on social media.

40 **Mr. Bettencourt**:

41 State Statues have a legal obligation in the wording.

43 **Tanya Donnelly**, 40 West Duston Rd [Video 1:09:21]

44 Chamber: Salem is a family community, including the inlaws.

45 19-year resident.

1 Seconds what John Sytek, especially people will be pitted against each other with
2 wards.
3 Town's population doubles or triples by day with employees. Connect service with those
4 who buy and tax relief to our town.
5 Communications Director: Should not be in the charter, should be a job role, hired by
6 the Town Manager.
7 Prefers a Communications Committee.
8 Simplify communications.
9 Need a Town Calendar. Bring in the Admins of the various Facebook residents
10 groups.
11 Going to a digital age. Mailings are expensive
12 Warrant articles are vetted by the Budget Committee.
13 Can do a better job summarizing. It's all recorded.
14 We have good communication, but it's not organized.

15
16 **Paul Pelletier**, 10 Granite Ave [Video: 1:14:46]

17 Voting is the right of the people.

18 Board member qualifications can be a concern. Candidates need to do more info about
19 who they are. More than Candidate nights. Mailings to voters?

20 Voters do know for whom they are voting.

21 The commission couldn't do a better job than they are doing.

22 Get people involved. Civics club at Salem HS. Few young people are present today.

23 Correction of initial presentation: The budget starts at the CIP Capital Improvement
24 Program (CIP)

25
26 **Steven Goddu**, 5 Candlestick Lane [Video at 1:18:00]

27 "We live in the greatest city, the greatest town, in the state, and the greatest state in the
28 union. We are passionate ...to keep citizen's government alive and well."

29 The Commission was formed to tweak a few things in town, not to turn it upside down.

30 Does everyone remember these signs? [Showed sign from 3 years ago regarding
31 warrant article to allow State Reps to be elected by wards. "Stop Redistricting.
32 Vote NO on 15."]

33 More than 75% of the town voted against districts to elect our State Reps.

34 They don't want it. That's how cities are run. We want to be a town.

35 "If your proposal for a new charter includes districts, I can assure you there will be a
36 significant — and passionate — campaign to not move forward with any changes on
37 the charter."

38 "If the changes that you have come up with are important to you, that if you add this [wards]
39 in, or if you add in that we are going to be a city, you can be sure there will be a
40 campaign that will be designed to make sure that we do not make any changes.

41
42 **Tom Linehan**, 151 Lowell Rd [Video: 1:21:10]

43 John Sytek stole my thunder.

44 Districting to me is a killer.

45 Size of Council: 7-9 is a good number for a committee of any kind.

46 For those complaining that the info isn't available: The information is there. Go to Town
47 Clerk's page on the town website. The ballot is there.

Betty Gay, 10 Woodmeadow Drive [Video: 1:23:50]

Speaking as a citizen, not a Representative

Wants a Website Admin to be hired (full-time job)

Don't divide into wards

People should be allowed to vote on zoning changes, even if they don't understand

Selectmen shouldn't be allowed to reduce the amount requested in citizen's petition's

People's proposals for town articles should not be subject to Town Council approval.

25 signatures might not be enough, but 10% is ridiculous.

Titles of warrant articles need to be improved.

Forums for candidates were started by Women's Clubs, now Chamber of Commerce.

We should encourage forums for warrants articles.

Bob Bryant: Clinton St [Video at 1:28:00]

Citizen not as a selectman:

Slide show: Selectmen do not negotiate with unions, but that is done by Town Manager.

[School board members do their own negotiations with the unions.]

Selectmen receive a \$3,000 salary, which comes down to about \$3.50 per hour.

Didn't know about municipal government when he came in. Good to jump in and learn as you go.

Brian Thornock, 5 Brookdale Rd [1:31:14]

Regarding Article 7: Citizen Concerns, Initiative Petition, Referendum, Official Ballot

Questions, Recall: Why were these separated?

Mr. Campbell: Each section serves a different process. Each was explained.

Mr. Thornock:

Why were these separated? Right now, we can do it all through Warrant Articles.

With this Draft Charter, we will not be able to submit a Warrant Article. We have to

submit something 90 days before an election, otherwise, we can't get a warrant

article on the ballot. It would have to be done by an initiative petition or referendum

and go to a special election. That's insane.

Wards: More people are opposed. If there are wards, there will be vote exchanging.

(Vote for my issue, I'll vote for yours.)

Shortening the ballot: especially the budget, has ramifications: If it's all rolled up, with

many things on budget, we lose the ability to vote on issues.

People need more understanding of warrant articles, and the underlying thought

processes.

I keep hearing "Incremental change." This draft is a solution in search of a problem. It

takes away my ability to be involved in my government. Taking away my

legislative authority and turning it to an elected body.

You can't have 300 million legislators in the United States. We elect people to represent

us on the State level and on the federal level because you can't have everyone

putting their two cents in. Are we at that point yet? Or are we coming up with

solutions to problems that don't exist?

1 **Ruth Leosz**, 12 Rivers Edge Drive [1:41:44]

2 Political signs all over: State Rep, State Senate, Town Positions. No clue who these
3 people are, what they stand for, what their party is. Where can I find out? Town
4 website?

5 **Mr. Campbell**: Town Elections are nonpartisan. For State Reps: Parties are on the
6 ballot. To find out where they stand on issues: The Chamber hosts a Candidates
7 Nights which is on Salem Community TV.

8 **Ms. Leosz**: Would like a moratorium on town building. Concerned about town
9 resources, especially water.

10
11 **Claire Karibian**: [1:45:00]

12 There is a lot of talk about "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." However, in the last 4 years, we
13 have gone through a tremendous amount of change. Zoom in schools.
14 We can no longer live in a cocoon; we need to become a butterfly.
15 We need wards to allow the town to see what is happening in each section.
16 We need to tweak some things and become the butterfly!

17
18 **Mr. Campbell**: [Video: 1:48:30]

19 Thanks for coming. Next meeting Wednesday.
20 Goal: Finalize draft by end of the month.
21 Town attorney to review then the State Attorney.
22 Once it is approved, it will be on the ballot in March.

23
24 **MOTION BY Mr. Bettencourt to adjourn**. Seconded by Ms. Loranger

25 **Vote**: 7-0-0

26 Meeting adjourned at 11:48.

27
28 Minutes taken by: Bonnie Wright

29 Minutes Approved: Salem 2022 Charter Commission

30 Date: _____

31
32 **Video**:

33 The video of this meeting may be viewed at:

34 <https://www.facebook.com/sctv17/videos/1051790222141890>

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

36 The video for this meeting ends at marker 1:48:36.

37
38 Send an email to the Commissioners at:

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

40
41
42 **Charter Commission Meeting Schedule**: Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

43 12th meeting: Wednesday, August 17, 7 pm

44 13th meeting: Wednesday, August 24, 7 pm

45 14th meeting: Wednesday, August 30, 7 pm/