

Middletown Charter Review Committee
Minutes 28 June 2017

Attendees (Underline & **Bold indicates present)**

Chris Semonelli, Chair
Barbara Barrow
William Flynn, Sr.
Paul Mankofsky

Art Weber, Vice Chair
Roby Faria
Wendy Heaney
Kevin O'Halloran

Richard Adams, Sec.
Linda Finn
Marilyn Hennessey
Tom Silveira

Ex Officio/Liaisons (Underline & **Bold indicates present)**

Councillor Barbara Vonvillas

Councillor Dennis Turano

Town Administrator Shawn Brown

Town Solicitor, Peter Regan

Administrative

A quorum being present Chris Semonelli called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

The minutes of May 31, 2017 were reviewed. It was noted that the Town Solicitor, Peter Regan provided an overview of the current Town Charter. The Minutes were amended to reflect his discussion and the Minutes unanimously approved.

Charter Review and Discussion

Mr. Regan began the discussion by providing a brief overview of the Charter, its history and amendments. To assist his overview of Charter change history, copies of Middletown ballots were provided showing Charter change referenda from 2000 through 2016.

Lead by Peter Regan, the Committee conducted an Article-by-Article review and discussion. The table below summarizes the discussion.

Article/ Section	Discussion	Recommended Changes
Preamble	The committee discussed Charter changes and the change process. It was emphasized that any change must be approved by the Committee by a majority vote and approved by the Town Council before being placed on the 2018 ballot.	None
I/101 & 102	Peter explained that this section reaffirms the powers of the Town under RIGL. The Section also address the progression of the form of Town government from Town meeting to Town Council and Town Manager.	None
II/201	Mr. Regan continued his explanation of the history of the Charter since original adoption in 1968. The Committee discussed the powers of Town government and the Town Council especially as it relates to the Town Administrator and Town staff members. The Committee noted that Council electors are now non-partisan, a change approved in 2016.	None
II/202	The Committee discussed the definition of "elector" and who may be considered a Middletown citizen, the size of the Council, and noted the recent difficulties in finding citizens willing to devote the time required to stand for office. The Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of term limits, whether such limits would increase community involvement in the election process, how term limits could be implemented, and the effects on Council effectiveness. The Committee requested additional data on other councils with term limits. Further discussion of council term limits was deferred pending availability of data on other councils. The Committee also discussed staggered terms such as the School Committee and asked for data from other municipalities. The Committee discussed Councillor compensation and generally agreed that compensation was not an issue.	Pending receipt of additional data on the efficacy of council term limits

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Article/ Section	Discussion	Recommended Changes
II/203	Mr. Regan provided an overview of the section and its importance for the conduct of orderly, regular meetings.	None
II/204	After a general discussion of the section, and especially the meaning of "...military law", Mr. Regan agreed to provide an explanation of this phrase at the next meeting.	None
II/205	The Committee discussed the effect of compensation on the elective process and whether increased compensation would increase election participation. It was generally agreed that increased compensation would not be helpful.	None
II/206	Shawn and Peter provided an explanation of how, in practice, this section is applied. Shawn noted that the section is routinely invoked by the Council when a request is made for more information on an item under consideration by the Council.	None
II/207	This section, which enumerates the express powers of the Town Council was reviewed in detail by the Committee. The Committee discussed especially the ability of the Council to make or eliminate Town departments and/or agencies and the bonding power of the Council. Mr Flynn suggested that a super-majority would be a good idea for bonding actions. In general, the Committee did not feel this change necessary. Shawn will provide historical data on bond referenda.	None
II/208	The Committee discussed the Town Council budget approval process. It was noted that a balanced budget is required and that the Council has "bottom line" authority only over School System budgets as required by RIGL. The Committee also discussed the limits of Town budget increases	None

The Committee agreed to complete the discussion of Section 208 and Article II at the next meeting.

Charter Change Schedule

Shawn reviewed with the Committee steps necessary to place Charter changes on the ballot for the 2018 election. Milestones and deadlines are as follows:

Date	Event
December 2017	Charter Review Committee (CRC) work complete.
March 2018	CRC Change Recommendations submitted to Town Council.
June 2018	Last date for changes to Council.
July-September 2018	Town Council consideration of recommended changes. Council hearings on Council accepted Charter changes.
October 2018	Charter changes submitted to RI Secretary of State for incorporation in 2018 ballot.
Tuesday, November 6, 2018	Referendum on proposed Charter Changes

Next Meeting

The next Committee meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, July 26 and Wednesday, August 30, 2017. All meetings are at 6:00 PM in the Middletown Library conference room.

The next meeting will complete discussion of Article II, The Town Council; and consider Article II, The Town Administrator and Article IV, Initiative and Referendum

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Richard Adams, Secretary