

J. Hudson
1-28-21
(Contributor: T. Rose York)

Charter Chat #5

1/24/21

3:00pm-4:30pm (90 mins)

Facilitator: Larry R., Tia T., Janis H.

Host: Emily D.

Notes: Janis H., Tiffany R. Y.

Live Q & A monitor: Janis H., Tiffany, R. Y.

CRC Facilitators: Councilor Lisa F., Councilor Tony P.

Panelists: Jon Hecht, Roberta Miller

This week's Charter Chat (CC) consisted of 32 people at max, and began with introductions/meeting guidelines. We announced the Spanish translation of First Look materials with the corresponding link (<https://www.watertownforward.org/faqs-1>). Councilors Tony Palomba and Lisa Feltner provided a thorough re-cap of the most recent CRC meeting on the 19th. There was a Q&A that followed with many links shared in the chat for specific information requested by attendees.

The second half of the Charter chat was devoted to an expert panel presentation and discussion regarding the hot topic of Mayoral vs. Manager/Council structure of government. Jon Hecht and Roberta Miller presented on various aspects of both Mayoral and Manager/Council forms of government per their experience and expertise. This included a historical overview, acknowledgement of the wide variety that can exist within each structure, as well as a walk-through of the municipality comparison chart provided by the Collins Center (<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/1889>). Their presentations were engaging and informative. As such, a rich discussion followed. Given the specialized nature of the information discussed, we highly recommend viewing the recording itself for specifics.

CRC SUMMARY / Q&A

(Q=Question C=Comment)

Q1: There were a few questions regarding the process by which changes to the charter are approved. To this end, is there a way for the public to see what Town Councilors are proposing for charter changes so we can weigh in supporting or not? This resource from the WF website was shared. <https://www.watertownforward.org/faqs-1>

Q2: When does the Manager present a preliminary budget?

C1: The CRC on the 19th was more of a discussion with the public which was favorable.

WATERTOWN GOVERNMENT MANAGER/MAYOR: PANEL

(Q=Question C=Comment)

Q1: Structure and laws aside, what are the optimal norms for local good governance, and how can they be cultivated here in Watertown?

Q2: Opinion question posed to the panel: What would benefit Watertown the most?

Q3: How are term limits set, and can we revise these in the Charter?

Q4: Should the council have power or input in CEO/Manager being fired/hired?

Q5: How long has the TM been in his position?

C1: An attendee appreciated Jon's point that "Even within existing law and regulations, there is some degree of local discretion to create structures and procedures that are fair, just, resilient, and high-quality."

C2: An attendee reminded us that each structure of government involves a group of humans and their beliefs/behaviors. Laws and structure get you only so far, we must consider the individuals. If leaders aren't changing, how will keeping our current TM/Council government really lead to any change knowing that the same people will be in charge (and have their set ways of doing things)?

C3: Sentiments shared around prioritizing checks and balances.

C4: "Regarding down demographics; One of the issues that I've seen is the difficulties for these new demographics to get their voices heard/participate in government, especially in a town where many are life-long/generational families. How have these communities coped with bringing more diversity into municipal leadership? Were there certain programs/forms of governments /etc that lent themselves to that?"

C5: Lots of comments and concerns regarding the evaluation process of TM.

C7: "Now that there's more interest in local government (and the presidential campaigns are behind us), there's a crying need for more of this re: basic knowledge of what is, and what could be. Various schools and philanthropic initiatives are focusing on community leadership development."

C8: "The problem with long term office holding is entrenchment and interests."

C9: "I think we all need to be mindful of the magical ways in which hope and history meet. There's a huge wave of activism that's been in place across the land. My sense is that that's here in Watertown, too. How it finds expression in local government is a wondrous work-in-progress."

CLOSING POLL & FEEDBACK

As is customary, this Charter Chat ended with a poll. We decided to get more specific with our closing poll in order to close the loop on the topics discussed. Below you will find the poll with results in yellow. No suggestions/feedback for future Charter Chats were expressed. As always, we appreciate the time and commitment of all involved.

Considering the following values: Transparency, accountability, diversity/equity/inclusion, responsiveness, communication, public engagement, & fiscal management, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 =strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

1. Watertown can improve upon these values with our current Town Manager/Town Council structure with specific changes in the Charter addressing these values.

Strongly Agree = 39% (9)

Agree = 39% (9)

Neutral = 9% (2)

Disagree = 0% (0)

Strongly Disagree = 13% (3)

2. Watertown is already achieving most of these values and no changes to our Town Manager/Town Council structure is needed.

Strongly Agree = 4% (1)

Agree = 9% (2)

Neutral = 22% (5)

Disagree = 13% (3)

Strongly Disagree = 52% (12)

3. In order to improve upon these values, Watertown should change to a Mayoral form of government.

Strongly Agree = 13% (3)

Agree = 0% (0)

Neutral = 52% (12)

Disagree = 22% (5)

Strongly Disagree = 13% (3)