

## Charter Chat #8

3/7/21 | 1500-1630

Facilitator: Larry R., Tia T., Janis H. | Host: Emily D. | Notes: Janis H. | Chat monitor: Dan D. | CRC Facilitators: Councilor Lisa F., Councilor Tony P.

### KEY

CRC = Charter Review Committee	TCP = Town Council President
SC = Subcommittee	TM = Town Manager
TC = Town Council	CC = Charter Chat
WF = Watertown Forward	DEI = Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

### **WELCOME**

This week’s Charter Chat, which completed the “Good Trouble” series, set out to stir up conversation on the remaining three topics within the Platform of Ideas: The Preamble, The Charter review process, and Fiscal Responsibility/Civic Investment. In addition, we discussed the new proposal from the Collins Center, administered a poll on CRC correspondence, shared updates from the JEDI talking group, and connected community members interested in civic engagement. It was a packed agenda, which hopefully served to further empower, inspire and educate those in attendance.

This CC attracted a total of 22 attendees during the 90-minute session. The meeting began with an overview of Watertown Forward, purpose and desired outcomes of the Chat, and the agenda and guidelines.

### **BLOCK A: “Wisdom of the Crowd”**

After a brief recap of the Charter Review Committee meeting, held March 2, 2021, *Block A* concentrated on an open forum for attendee comments and questions.

Notable themes that emerged:

- Much of the conversation centered around the Collins Center proposal, which splits the Charter Review into two tracks.
  - **Track 1: Continue to make desired revisions**, sticking to current timeline
  - **Track 2: Revise Article 8, Sec. 8–1(b) in two ways:**
    - Reset 10-year review, beginning up to 4 years from now (2025), and redesign Charter Review mechanism: *smaller; no Councilors, only voters*
- Some thought we should shelve the mayor/manager discussion, and work to make improvements within the current context.
- Many thought the Collins Center’s proposal was not a new idea. It was proposed early on in this process. Many questions emerged from this conversation: Why now? How can we avoid “kicking the can down the road”? What is going to change in three years to make this process more digestible and efficient? What metrics have we use and should we use to measure success? ☐ If we smartly use of the time we have now to make some strategic changes to the Charter, then hopefully we’ll have some measures to say what is working/not so we can make some changes in a bigger way in 3-4 yrs. As an attendee pointed out, “We’ve had 10 years and have no measures...with no evaluations...let’s learn from our mistakes.”
- The term “measures” comes up a lot. Looks like there is a decent amount of ambiguity there. We need some clarifying language around what Watertown uses as it’s “measures” in any part of the Charter.
- Terms limits: This is important so that TC’s don’t become entrenched in their seat. The same eyes on the review process equals the same problems with the review.
- Our continued growth during a pandemic is a concern for some.

**BLOCK B: "Good Trouble"**

The second part of the Chat was devoted to productive action. We created three breakout groups and asked everyone to discuss how the current ideas listed in the POI could be edited, changed, or expanded upon relative to their breakout topic. There was robust discussion, which resulted in many additions and changes to the current Platform of Ideas (which is a collection of specific ideas for the Charter generated from our discussions over the past few months.) It is important to note that the POI includes both specific suggestions that would be eligible for Charter review as well as other "wish list" items for a better city.

Here is the updated copy of the Platform of Ideas, which represents these discussions.

## Platform of Ideas

*--As of March 11, 2021 (J.Hudson)*

***Note: Please contact Watertown Forward's resource team with ideas or questions: Marcy Murningham @ [marcy.murningham@gmail.com](mailto:marcy.murningham@gmail.com) or Councilor Lisa Feltner @ [lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov](mailto:lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov).***

### Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI)

1. There is interest in forming a Community Advisory Board to interface with the Police Dept and maintain strong 2-way communication.
2. We are in need of a Diversity Officer in our city.
3. Formation of a Human Rights Commission to which people could bring concerns or complaints.
4. Watertown should be collecting and analyzing JEDI data.
  - a. We must establish comparable, useful metrics that the city monitors, measures, and evaluates in order to determine whether or not we are achieving JEDI goals.
  - b. This should be published and disclosed to the public on regular intervals.
5. JEDI should serve as its own competency/performance metric used to evaluate the TM.
6. JEDI language embedded in the Preamble
7. JEDI language should be integrated throughout the Charter, so it serves as more than an isolated goal, rather a touchstone of our town's governance.
8. Add language in the Charter to streamline and encourage citizen initiatives.

### Transparency/Evaluation/Disclosure

1. The Executive Branch's performance evaluation should be a more transparent and inclusive public process that aligns with Watertown's vision and values and incorporates material benchmarks and targets, so as to measure progress toward that vision and enactment of those values.
2. The performance evaluation framework and methodology should be evidence-based and include: :
  - a. both qualitative (JEDI, climate resilience, collaborative engagement, responsiveness) and quantitative metrics (fiscal performance), because they are interrelated and of equal importance;
  - b. incorporate thresholds and benchmarks, because performance, both individual and institutional, does not exist in a vacuum — there are impacts and consequences; and
  - c. feature metrics that are auditable, comparable, relevant, and useful (ACRU).
  - d. To the extent possible, given provisions contained in collective bargaining agreements and contracts, there should be performance reviews for all staff, not just the TM.
3. This information should be contained in an Annual Report to the City / Town, available in multiple languages, that shows progress toward or away from Watertown's vision and values.
4. In general, residents feel in the dark when it comes to town governance. The impression is that decisions are being made "behind closed doors" without adequate public discussion and engagement. We must do better and aim for more openness in order to build trust within our community.
5. How can we do a better job of keeping the town abreast of large-scale projects/initiatives, such as the high school project? This should be a fully transparent process with lots of public input.

6. All communication to town officials should be made public.
7. How does the TC get access to info? There should be a clear internal process established.
8. There should be more disclosure and clearer guidelines regarding potential conflicts of interest with the TM, other town officials, and outside parties doing business with Watertown. These include:
  - a. Limits on TM membership on advisory boards, committees, and commissions
    - i. The TCP should not necessarily sit as chair of the School Board.
    - ii. Any council member should be considered to serve on the School Board.
  - b. How boards, committees, and the commissions are formed
  - c. How members are recruited and appointed, including their qualifications

#### **Balance of Power/Capacity**

1. Change the ratio between district and at-large councilors.
2. Reconsider term limits for both legislative and executive branches.
3. Increase compensation packages for councilors.
4. Add more staff positions/support for our city and/or full-time council
5. Require that each CRC subcommittee has at least one resident member with the power to vote and/or provide input on the same equitable level as the council members.
6. Too much authority in TM/TCP. TC is too weak. TC should be strong enough to set rules and fees, make policy, and investigate/respond to major material problems with greater authority, discretion, and accountability.
7. Should we move from town manager to mayor?
8. The town council should have the authority to call a dept head to council.
9. Either way, the Town council should elect the town council president.
10. Adjust precincts per district (vs. changing district #'s) in order to balance the work of the TC.

#### **Communication/Responsiveness**

1. There should be principles, policy, and protocol in place regarding public inquiry responsiveness. Many times inquiries go totally unanswered. This is unacceptable. Public officials should reply within 48 hours, for example.
2. There is interest in requiring two annual public forums, one from the Executive Branch hosted by the Town Manager and the other from the Legislative Branch hosted by the Town Council President.
  - a. Additionally, there is interest in extending this requirement to every elected official.
3. Clarify and improve the communication process for residents. For example, the new CIO publicly encouraged residents to reach out directly to him, but the TM/TCP have discouraged direct communication with him.
4. Residents feel they are being informed on a “need to know” basis. We need a stronger Communications department.
5. The nature of communication should shift away from reactive to proactive; from defensive to solution-oriented.

#### **Fiscal Responsibility/Civic Investment**

1. Budget: The process should include more input from the public as well as input from the entire council, not just 3 members. We should host (more than one) public meeting on the budget.
2. Public Priorities: The town budget can't be the only priority in town governance.
3. Productive Assets: Consideration should be given to more robust and productive deployment of local assets, in service to public priorities. This “public benefit test” should apply, but not limited, to portfolio assets held by major tax-exempt institutions based in Watertown and agreements negotiated with private developers. , how businesses can be tapped to provide more resources to the community.
4. Public Benefit Test: We should be asking more of developers and major NGOs. How are you adding value to our community? How are you helping to advance our goals and vision/values? They must demonstrate how they would contribute to the fiscal, environmental, social, and cultural vibrancy of our community. We are not just a piece of cheap land with a convenient location to the city.

5. Participatory Budgeting: Watertown should consider using Participatory Budgeting, wherein the community members decide how to spend a predetermined portion of the town budget.
6. Civic Financial Literacy: Watertown should cultivate broader public awareness and understanding of fiscal policy, budget making, and how investment decisions are made.
  - a. Sharing with the community more info about where our money goes and how each expense reflects our values. One way to achieve this might with the use of an online Visual Budget, modeled after Arlington.
  - b. Disclosure about our community's fixed costs — pension liability, debt service costs, health care insurance, etc. — so as to better understand what limits our ability to pay for public priorities. .

#### **Preamble: Vision / Values**

1. Land acknowledgment language
2. Climate resilience language
3. Justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, human rights
4. The preamble is a declaration of civic stewardship, a public promise. It signals guiding principles and values that connect Watertown's past to its present and future.
5. The preamble should evoke a sense of belonging and community.
6. It can serve as the basis for integrated reporting in order to monitor progress, creation, preservation, and erosion of values over time.

#### **The Charter Review Process**

1. Selection and composition of the Charter Review Committee:
  - The entire Town Council should not serve on the CRC
  - The Town Council President should share the role of appointing citizen members
  - The CRC should comprise 50 percent citizen members
  - Selection should reflect JEDI values. Perhaps some language to the effect of "those selecting the committee will do their best to reflect the town demographic"
2. Charter Review should be conducted every 5 years instead of 10 given the pace of growth/development in our city.
3. Sync the timing of charter reviews to the timing of the length of the town manager's contract.
4. There should be public education initiatives established as an integral part of the Charter Review process.
5. Town council president should not automatically be the chair of the CRC.
6. The town must prepare and provide an appropriate packet of materials for Charter Review Members 14 days prior to the first CRC meeting. This should include: Copy of the current Charter, current Town Gov't Org Chart, last 3 annual budgets, key employee profiles (length of employment, contract status, salary & benefits), town council profiles, relevant sections of MA general law/code related to Charter Review/functioning of the town/home rule, and access to their own town email account.
7. Add an administrative role to support the CRC's work.
8. The TC President should not be appointing CRC community members.
9. We need to define the priorities in the current review and how those would dovetail into the considerations for review in 3-3 years.
10. We must define measures for success so that we can use the data to inform the review in 3-4 years.

#### **CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION**

- WF continues to encourage participants to reach out directly to the CRC with feedback, ideas, suggestions, questions, concerns and the like. Recognizing that we all have different comfort levels and experience when communicating with the town, the POI also serves as a potential source for people to pull language.
- We have also amassed the Channels of Communication (in order of importance)
  - **Channels of Communication**

- Email CRC members or your individual TC. *\*\*Please be sure to email each individual CRC member; the general CRC email does not go to all members\*\**
  - Attend a CRC Meeting and give live feedback or write in and ask for your comment to be made part of the public record and read at the CRC mtg.
  - Complete the CRC poll
  - Feedback form
  - Participate in any of the CRC subcommittees (Preamble, Communications).
- This contact document was created by the WF team. It was sourced from the town website and compiled into one convenient place. In addition to contact info for town councilors and resident CRC members, it includes a precinct map and street listing to help you identify your town councilor.  
[https://51e6d7-144a-4719-bde1-ce634675c379.filesusr.com/ugd/595c33\\_b7f49aa4eb2e49718704a0eee67522c7.pdf](https://51e6d7-144a-4719-bde1-ce634675c379.filesusr.com/ugd/595c33_b7f49aa4eb2e49718704a0eee67522c7.pdf)

### **MEETING CLOSE**

Every CC ends with info slides for the next CRC meeting (3/16 @ 6pm), Charter Chat (3/21 @ 3pm), Preamble Subcommittee meeting (3/8 @ 5:30pm), and Communications Subcommittee meeting (3/18 @ 5pm) and form of audience questionnaire or poll. This week, we were curious how many participants have made an effort to reach out to the CRC and what the response they have gotten back, if any. Below are the results of this Chat's poll, highlighted in yellow. As always, we appreciate the time and commitment of all who took time to participate.

#### **Poll:**

- Have you sent in comments to the CRC? **Yes = 75%. No = 25%**
- Did you receive a meaningful response that indicated they were being considered? **Yes = 25%; No = 75%**

For a fuller grasp of what happened at this and other Charter Chats, we encourage you to watch the recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzBg8zsK8PI>