

Received 10/27/26
11:45 AM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham
Special Board of Selectmen
Wednesday, July 22, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.
3rd floor, Town Hall, and Remote via Zoom

Meeting Recording

Passcode: wkmj4&Ek

Charter Revision Workshop Minutes

1. Call to Order

First Selectman Rea called the Special Board of Selectman meeting on Wednesday, July 22, 2026, to order at 5:30 p.m. Also present: Selectman Chadd and Selectman Hennick (arrived at 6:01 p.m.).

Charter Commission Members: Laura Francis, Al DiVincentis, Eileen Buckheit

2. Discuss Feedback from the Public Hearing

Section 8.2 Fire Protection Services

Laura Francis said it is a good idea for the town to have agreements with their service providers. The town has statutory responsibility to provide fire protection. The structure of various fire companies around Connecticut varies greatly. An agreement spells out what is expected from both parties; noting current successful agreements between the ambulance and state police. These agreements do not tell the professionals “how” to do their role but creates expectations and performance measures, ownership of property and insurances. An agreement would also give the town the ability to find another service provider if Durham Volunteer Fire Company Inc. dissolved; as it is the town’s responsibility to provide these services. Laura encouraged the Fire Company to view a service agreement as an opportunity to map out what will work for both sides, rather than view it as an adversarial topic. Laura also notes that the affordability to live in Durham may impact volunteer enrollment in the future. Laura advised the Board of Selectman to not give up the “Inc.” without knowing the implications.

Selectman Chadd showed appreciation regarding Laura’s concerns but said that Durham Volunteer Fire Company Inc. never missed a call and is concerned that a service agreement could put the Fire Company in a vulnerable situation if performance measures were not met. Chadd said the members of the Company feel it is a drastic change and do not support this agreement at this time. Laura finished by saying it is not their intention and hopes Selectman Chadd educates their members so all can see the benefits of the agreement. Selectman Chadd wants to further investigate the “Inc.” versus “department” language to gain a more comprehensive grasp on the situation. Then, he would like to bring the information to the Fire Chief to decide which would benefit their needs more.

First Selectman Rea mentioned that the Fire Company enrollment has improved in the past two and a half years. He recently spoke with Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) where another town is experiencing difficulties with volunteer enrollment and may be forced to investigate other options. Rea will bring an update to Rich Roberts including some examples of agreements.

Al DiVincentis advised the Durham Volunteer Fire Company Inc. to have an agreement with the town.

Section 9.1 Town Administrator

First Selectman Rea opened the discussion about having a Town Administrator; noting that it is not the intention to add extra staff resulting in higher taxes, but to provide continuity of government. He mentioned that due to the overwhelming opposition, he would like to break this topic out to a separate ballot question to ensure the rest of the charter revision would not be lost due to this section.

Selectman Chadd noted the great opposition the Selectmen have received over this revision. He spoke about hearing from other towns that even though the First Selectman will move to part-time, the responsibilities and phone calls may require more of a full-time schedule, which is a concern.

Laura Francis mentioned that change can be difficult; especially when there are currently no perceived problems. She noted that town governance is becoming more complex and an administrator could provide training and knowledge to support staff; creating efficiencies and to keep government costs down. She noted the increase in taxes during the past revaluation.

Al DiVincentis spoke in favor of continuity and efficient government, professionalization of town operations and Human Resources experience. He clarified that a town administrator would have no discretion with respect to policy and the town would continue its Town Meeting form of government. The administrator would execute the policy as well as be able to take better advantage of grants.

Eileen Buckheit noted that towns similar in size to Durham are utilizing a town administrator while others are currently considering making this change. She noted that educating the voters on the benefits of a town administrator could allow a more informed vote on this issue.

Selectman Hennick asked Eileen what vehicle would allow the town to further educate the voters on having a town administrator. He noted that awareness was spread through public hearings and recorded open Charter Revision meetings. Eileen suggested public outreach, written materials, social media and focus groups. Hennick also asked why increasing the Board of Selectman to 5 from 3 was included in the town administrator language. Laura responded by stating the additional members would provide opportunities for a diversity of opinions and experiences.

Section 2.1 General Town Elections

First Selectman Rea opened the discussion about elected versus appointed positions. He noted the initial pushback from the townspeople as well as the current trend in Connecticut with roughly half of the towns having appointed Town Clerks, Tax Collectors and Treasurers. First Selectman Rea also mentioned an overlap of duties between the Treasurer and Finance Director that should be addressed.

Eileen Buckheit commented that similarly to a Town Administrator, appointed Town Clerks, Tax Collectors and Treasurers are a further step in the professionalization of Town Hall. The benefits include reducing turnover and improving hiring standards based on experience. She noted the essential functions of the Tax Collector and Town Clerk related to the high level of expertise needed to execute those functions; stating that years of experience could end abruptly based on an election.

Charter Revision Member at 1:09:11 commented that he did not believe the role of Tax Collector or Town Clerk is a political job, but rather a following of state statutes and policy.

Selectman Chadd shared an email about certain words throughout the charter that should be defined. First Selectman Rea suggested adding a definitions section to the charter.

Section 5.1.9 Special Appropriations

First Selectman Rea, on the suggestion of several people, said that rather than setting the percentage needed to go to a Referendum for a special appropriation approval, set a flat dollar amount such as \$500,000. If not, then clarify which budget the percentage pertains to, such as the net town budget. He also mentioned that he would support the idea of the dollar amount going up with inflation; indicating that a percentage would suffice. He spoke to the \$40,000 special appropriation to go to Town Meeting; hoping that number would be higher.

Laura Francis said that indebtedness should not be taken lightly and that the Town Meeting should have a say.

Eileen Buckheit commented that for the 3rd referendum for the school budget of \$42 million this year, there were 1,000 voters.

Section 6.1 Durham Conservation Commission

First Selectman Rea started by saying the Conservation Commission does great work. He said many of the properties are used by various entities and a commission that meets once a month cannot cover the demand to provide the services needed. First Selectman Rea feels that certain aspects should be handled by Town Hall while certain members of the Commission are not supporting the change.

Al DiVincentis said that a town does not have to have a conservation commission, but if it does, it must have the statutory powers. The 2006 Charter included extra power; being in control of leases. The Charter Commission largely

removed the leasing language; sticking to the statutory powers. He stated that the Conservation Commission's view is that they should administer and enforce lease contracts. Al also noted that the Board of Selectmen, with the new charter language, could still grant powers to the Conservation Commission to handle a lease negotiation on a case-by-case basis, but without the revision, the Commission has absolute power, even if the Town wants to do something with an open space.

Laura Francis added that the language could remain granting the power to the commission, but to add language at the end that essentially says, "ultimately...would have to get Board of Selectmen approval" giving the final decision to the Selectmen rather than the Commission. Laura mentioned a situation in the past where a lease was not getting enforced; leaving payments in the rear and the Board of Selectmen had to step in to renegotiate the lease. She supports the work of the Conservation Commission while putting checks and balances in place so that final approval comes from the Board of Selectmen.

Eileen Buckheit commented that this change supports the theme of professionalizing Town Hall.

Section 2.9.1 Compensation

First Selectman Rea felt that a Human Resources professional, even part-time, could better assist in compensation review, noting the lack of professional experience on the Board.

Selectman Chadd mentioned the possibility of entering an agreement with an HR consulting firm.

Laura Francis spoke about Capital Region Purchasing Council, which Durham is a member, that has an HR firm in place that Durham could utilize.

Al DiVincentis spoke about the Town Administrator language, and if passed, to look for someone with an HR background.

3. Discussion with Charter Revision Commission

First Selectman Rea asked for clarification about the Town Administrator language if it does not pass; pertaining to other sections that would need revision. First Selectman Rea would like to speak with Rich Roberts about logistics.

Laura Francis suggested wording the separate Administrator question to include phrasing that encompasses the other sections of the charter that mention Town Administrator.

Eileen Buckheit spoke in favor of increasing the Board of Selectmen from three to five. She also suggested staggering the elections so the Board would have continuity and not complete turnover. She encouraged public outreach to raise awareness for the Charter Revision.

Laura Francis said her role on the Charter Revision Committee, or anyone else involved in town government will not enrich themselves personally. If a Town Administrator position opens, she will not apply to it. She asked the Board to dispel any rumors and they agreed. She also discussed that once the ballot questions are set, the Board of Selectmen can work on an explanatory text to educate the voters, which would be without bias or persuasion.

4. Next Meeting

First Selectman Rea said there will be another workshop on a date and time to be determined later.

5. Adjournment

MOTION BY FIRST SELECTMAN REA, SECONDED BY SELECTMAN HENNICK, TO ADJOURN. VOTE: ALL AYE

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Beaudoin, Recording Secretary