

Received 9/12/25
10:53 AM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham
Charter Revision Commission
Public Hearing #1
Wednesday, September 10, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.
Community Center, Gymnasium, and Remote via Zoom
Public Hearing Minutes

Recording

Passcode: xep4s=Vb

Co-Chair Laura Francis called the Public Hearing of the Charter Revision Commission on Wednesday, September 10, 2025, to order at 7:00 p.m. Also in attendance: Co-Chair Martin Anderson (Zoom), Eileen Buckheit, Al DiVincentis, Matt LaFayette, Christian Godbout and John Bugai.

L. Francis read the following legal notice:

The Durham Charter Revision Commission, pursuant to [C.G.S. 7-191 \(a\)](#) will hold a Public Hearing on the current [Town Charter](#). The Commission is seeking input on any possible changes or suggestions to the Charter. For hard copies on the current Town Charter, please contact Town Hall at 860-349-3625. Further information on the hearing, including the Charter Revision Committee charge can be found on the [town website](#).

L. Francis explained that the Commission held an organizational meeting but cannot do any substantial work until after this Public Hearing. She opened the hearing up to Public Comment and asked that each speaker identify themselves and to please state in what capacity they are speaking.

Public Comment:

Debra DeFelice, Cherry Lane: speaking as a private citizen, felt the charter had a lot of good elements and should not be changed too much. She asked that any proposed revisions or removals to the charter be clearly shown to the public, not just a presentation of new language. She asked that nothing be changed in the charter to revert backwards on citizen participation and spoke on how the town is made up of volunteerism. Specifically, she felt the change of the Board of Education membership vote going to ballot instead of a vote at town meeting is more inclusive. There are residents who cannot attend town meetings due to their work schedule and never get a chance to voice their opinions/vote. She added that many residents do not consistently get the Town Times or pay for the Middletown Press and would like to see more notices posted on the town website. She thanked the members for volunteering for this commission.

Frank DeFelice, Cherry Lane: is the chair of Planning and Zoning, Inland Wetlands Watercourse Agency and Regional Planning Commission for the Lower CT River Valley but is speaking as a private citizen. Thanked the members for volunteering. Felt the current charter has served the town well for a long time but could use some updating. He would like to see the proposed deletions, edits, etc., when the members start working on their draft. Felt the Board of Education membership vote should remain on the ballot as it gives residents the biggest opportunity to weigh in on who they would like to see. Not everyone can attend a town meeting. There are some boards and commissions that need to be added to the charter and some that could be removed or are not currently active. He asked the members to consider the function of these boards/commissions, such as the Skating Pond Committee which is not currently active but is of value to the town, nonetheless.

Dave Mastroianni, Howard Road: is the chair of the Recreation Committee but speaking as a private citizen. He would like to see the new revisions compared to the current language. He felt this would be very beneficial to the public. He looked at charters from other towns and wondered what Durham is not up to date with.

Martin French, Maiden Lane: is the towns Tax Collector, but speaking as private citizen. Understood that the members have a rough plan to bring in chairmen and department heads and he strongly encouraged this. Potential changes in the charter will have real world consequences that only a board/commission/staff member would know about. He felt there should be a requirement for a Charter Revision Commission to be formed every 10 years, even if no changes are made. It should not be left up to the Board of Selectmen to take on the challenge or not. He will speak about the Tax Office and how the charter affects his daily work when called in. Stressed to the members to not be afraid to think big, consider regionalization, consider why something was changed and what the results have been (such as Board of Education membership vote). Just because you review a particular section, does not mean a change needs to be made. Urged the members not to avoid something that is "too big" or could "make waves".

Nancy Cuomo, Trout Lily Dr: speaking as both a private citizen and a member of the Board of Finance. When the charter was last revised in 2006, it included the Town Treasurer, but the town has since hired a Finance Director. Many towns in New England still call for the Treasurer to act as the primary Financial Officer and many have hired a professional Finance Director to act in that capacity. The town has a new Treasurer, and we will learn more about what their role is. As members define the Board of Finance sections, she encouraged them to in no way let the Finance Director role diminish the responsibility of the Treasurer. The Treasurer should oversee the funds, and the Finance Director oversee the accounting. This will serve the town as we move into the future and explore bonding options. She asked if the members would work on specific parts of the charter and when the public will be able to come back and comment. L. Francis responded that the members still need to define the process, but generally the answer is yes.

Marie Wilde, Haddam Quarter: is the chair of Compensation Review/Personnel Policy Board (CRPPB) and private citizen. Stressed the importance of including each board/commission in this charter review. It is important to understand the current charge of CRPPB and how to better define it, expectations working with Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance in the future. Asked that the members include CRPPB in any review or update to positions within the charter, as CRPPB may ultimately have a recommendation to offer.

L. Francis stated the commission received two written correspondence to be read into the record:

Bob Moore, Haddam Quarter: I will be unable to attend the public hearing on September 10 also have a Board of Education meeting that evening, but I would like to offer a proposal to amend the charter. The Board of Education while amending the District 13 Regional Plan revised the process of election of Board Members from the election at Town Meeting for 3 year terms to election at general election for a four year term to be consistent with the Town Charter. I recommend that the charter be revised to return to the former process for election at town meeting for several reasons:

1. Consistency with Middlefield election process. Right now we may be forced to have officer election almost every year because of the overlap in member terms and election schedules,
2. The general election made the member selection much more political in nature and members could be more focused on an agenda other than the best needs of our students
3. Some folks filling out the slate may not realize that the commitment to the Board of Education is so much more than a single monthly meeting which has led to a disturbing lack in attendance,
4. Election at the town meeting gives the voters an opportunity to hear from the candidates on why they want to be in the Board and what they will bring to it.

I hope you will consider this change, while it may not provide for more voters to participate in the election , it will provide those that do join the town meetings a much clearer picture of the candidates. Thanks for your consideration.

Joseph Pasquale, Parmelee Hill Rd: to members of the commission, I apologize for not being able to attend your meeting on 9/10/25. I would like to submit a request to the commission to review and discuss the limiting the number of members that are allowed to serve on our land use commissions. It appears that we currently have 4 members that serve on the Planning and Zoning commission along with serving on the Inland/Wetlands commission. This in my opinion consolidates to much influence in land use matters before our commissions. It also potentially disadvantages residents and applicants before these commissions if members have formed opinions from one commission they are seated on at the time. It has been stated in the past that allowing dual membership allows for communications between the commissions. I think that residents would best be served by not allowing dual service. But if this is not desirable by your commission. I might suggest that limiting one member per party to serve on these commission would address the concern of consolidation of influence by a group of individuals. Thank you all for your service and best wishes in completing this endeavor.

John Szewczyk, Stage Coach Road: thanked the members for serving and volunteering their time. Agreed with the statement earlier to think big and consider the future. He stated the importance of professionalizing Town Hall management by moving to a Town Manager form of governance. He noted the town of Clinton as an example and that towns are not moving towards a First Selectman form, but a Town Manager form. Felt that State Legislature is the place for retired police officers, teachers, etc. Local government needs someone with a master's degree, not someone who is popular and can win an election. He felt the town will be there in about 30 to 40 years and should get there sooner. The past of the town is subjective to who you speak with, but the town should move forward. Currently there is no Town Hall staff with Human Resources experience, and the town owes it to their employees to provide that. Another area to look at is the elected position of Tax Collector. This is a specialized field that could change at the drop of a dime in an election. The town has a Town Accountant but still has remnants of the Town Treasurer. He added that even with a Town Manager, the town would still have a Board of Selectmen to sign off on contracts. Thanked the members again.

George Eames, Haddam Quarter Road: was concerned the commission would be hog tied and is working without a budget, noting expenses will get high with legal review. Urged the members to take extremely good notes and follow what the 2006 commission did. He added that there are notes available from the last administration of issues they encountered such as capital expenditures, tremendous issues with vacancies and resignations with filling those seats per minority representation. This is not a requirement on Board of Education, but the requirement for small boards/commissions creates a struggle. He agreed that new positions should be added appropriately to the charter but does not want to see positions grow. The town should be keeping taxes low in this regard. Some job descriptions have not been updated in years, and this could be an uphill battle. Urged the members to make sure the Finance Director position does not take any duties away from the First Selectman, Board of Finance or Treasurer. These are all elected positions that are compensated and have certain tasks and duties to be performed. Same goes for the Facilities Manager not taking away responsibilities from any existing boards. It is great to see new residents involved and would ask the members to consider the possibility of term limits to allow new people to serve. Thanked the members for volunteering their time.

Roger Kleeman, Tuttle Road: urged the members to read/tie in the Personnel Policy and Procurement Policy when reviewing the charter. If the charter is not being followed, what happens. He noted the current charter does not have language to address this. Felt the charter is currently not being followed in many areas. How groups such as Durham Middlefield Interlocal Agreement Advisory Board, the Durham Public Library and more are being funded, questioned if this belongs in the charter and felt it should be investigated. Felt funny things are going on.

John Szewczyk: would like to see the committee, as opposed to the audience, on the zoom call.

Brendan Rea, First Selectman: for anyone watching the recording or reading the minutes, the commission can also be contacted via email any time at:

chartercommission@townofdurhamct.org

Roger Kleeman: felt that town meetings should be broadcast on Zoom. Although residents can't vote on zoom, the meetings could still offer remote access. Another issue is that the doors for the town meeting close if attendees are not inside 10 minutes after the start of the meeting. This should be addressed in the charter and felt individuals should still be able to observe the meeting even if they can't vote.

The committee thanked the members of the public for their participation. The committee will take a brief break and then start their special meeting to discuss the feedback they heard tonight.

Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jaclyn Lehet