

Received 6/23/26

3:12 PM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham

Charter Revision Commission **PUBLIC HEARING**

Wednesday, June 10, 2026 7:00pm

Community Center Gym, and Remote via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/vOjppfloxMEu4To3E4Q3eovV3ljCE9uDprxUmY6mIQtXPs3ZePebp9ZDFxLf2TW.HTvDMyMRe7yXRFij>

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Call to order

Co-chair Martin Anderson called the Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing of Wednesday, June 10, 2026 to order at 7:00 pm

Also present: Matt LaFayette, Christian Godbout, Eileen Buckheit, Christian Godbout, Al DiVincentis, Martin Anderson, Nick Charest: Town Clerk and Recording Secretary

Absent:

Members of the public were present in person and via zoom

1. Presentation of Draft Charter

- a. The Commission presented the draft charter, explaining the major changes and their process for reviewing and making edits. Major changes include:
 - i. Proposed transition to a Town Administrator,
 - ii. Increase to 4 selectmen
 - iii. appointed Town Clerk and Tax Collector
 - iv. Removal of Treasurer position
 - v. Creation of a Public Emergency Authority
 - vi. Changes to budget and finance procedures

- b. It was noted that the draft was reviewed by Town Counsel and that charter provisions do not supersede the United States Constitution, the Constitution of the State of Connecticut, or the Connecticut General Statutes. Also noted that additional public comment and suggestions should be directed to chartercommission@townofdurhamct.org

2. Public Hearing

- a. **Heather Petit, Democratic Registrar:**
 - i. Thanked the commission for their work. Expressed concern that the commission removed section on Registrar of Voters and sections on elections.

- ii. Under section 2.5, the Board of Selectmen fills vacancies in elected office. According to statute 9-192, Deputy Registrars are nominated by Registrars. Noted that Registrars take orders from the Secretary of State and Statute and are not subordinate to the Board of Selectmen. Draft charter states Durham employees cannot hire their own people, but registrars must hire poll workers Suggested sections on Registrar and Elections be added back into the charter.

b. **Maya Perry Liss, President of Library Board of Trustees:**

- i. Thanked the commission for their work, discussed Library Board of Trustees concerns. Provisions in the charter create scenarios where a future town administrator of first selectman could use the charter to impede free and open access to the public library.
 - 1. Sections 1.4, 9.1.4, and 10.5 seem to give the first selectman or town administrator the power to remove the library director. By state statute, this is the power of the library board.
 - 2. Under section 7.8 and 7.9, library books and materials are not under the custody and control of the library which creates potential for abuse by an official who takes issue with activities or books at the library.
 - 3. Spoke with CT State Library, CT Library Association, Association of CT Library Boards, CT Library Consortium, and the ALA for their opinion on the charter.
 - 4. Suggested the commission revise section 6.15, remove sections 7.8 and 7.9 and to involve the Library board in discussion.

c. **Robert Booz, Library Board of Trustees:** Stated that the review process was flawed and the draft raises the possibility of litigation between the town and the library. The Draft assumes all boards and commissions are of the same standing legally and can be lumped together. Noted that the commission did not reach out to the Library Board of Trustees to understand their responsibilities or allow them to speak during meetings outside of public comment. Expressed that the draft is adversarial and advocates micromanagement. Language in some places is better used as a policy or procedure.

- d. **Katie Forlini:** Read a letter from **Ann Doyle, Library Board of Trustee member** and previous library school media specialist at RSD13 with a master's in library science from Southern CT State University. Letter expressed concern for draft removing control of materials from the Library Director and Library Board of Trustees.
- i. Materials need to be under the control of the library for it to function as a free and open public library.
 - ii. The new hiring provisions included necessitate that the Library Board's responsibility for staffing be made clear and consistent with state statutes.
 - iii. Urged the commission to revise draft using language provided by the Library Board of Trustees.
 - iv. Suggested removal of section 7.9 which gives the First Selectman or Town Administrator authority to close the library in the event of an emergency. The library is often used as a warming or emergency center, and patrons should have the ability to remain open if patrons are waiting for transportation.
 - v. Expressed concern that the library may be closed using reason of maintenance or construction in order to prevent a speaker or event that does

not align with the views of the town chain of command. Cited example of Suffield and several similar instances across the country

- e. **Phil Augur, Conservation Commission Chair and Resident:** Conservation commission for decades has volunteers who help acquire, manage, maintain, and improve open space parcels. Volunteers steward open space to provide habitats that support a wide variety of flora and fauna and maintain trails which support recreation and education. The commission benefits from a diverse composition of volunteers including foresters, architects, hunters, agriculturalists, and educational professionals. The Commission disagrees that a town administrator would provide better stewardship, and that a purely advisory conservation commission would struggle to attract the same quality and quantity of members. As a resident, he commented that a town administrator is better suited to a large city. Expressed support for Library Board comments. Mandatory charter review every 10 years is “a solution in search of a problem” noting the US Constitution has only been amended 20 times

- f. **Sarah Robertson, Library Board of Trustees member:** echoed other Library Board members’ comments. Draft charter introduces potential for uncertainty and places restrictions on the Library Boards ability to operate effectively. Requested material changes in response to material concerns, rather than reassurance for intent of the commission.
 - i. Section 7.8 could affect operations because it sets up potential conflict between town charter and the State Statutes.
 - ii. Requested deletion of Section 7.8. Library must maintain custody and control of library books, collections, furnishings, and materials.
 - iii. Noted many items are purchased by CALS, outside donors, or state grants with the intent that the items then stay in the library. Proposed language may limit ability to work with outside donors.
 - iv. Expressed that draft does not consider unique differences of a municipal library compared to other departments.
 - v. Noted lack of clarity in draft language regarding responsibility of hiring, supervising, and evaluating the Library Director. This responsibility is provided for in State Statute

- g. **George Eames:** Noted experience serving on Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen, and as a previous First Selectman. Expressed concern that commission did not reach out to people who run the town and know the issues with the charter.
 - i. Expressed that town should continue to be dependent on volunteers and not necessarily change to professional staff.
 - ii. Page 19 Section 3.1.1 previously stated the Legislative body is vested at Town Meeting. Statute 7.193A1 does not state that although it is referenced in the proposed section 3.1.1.
 - iii. Proposed section does not include several items the Town Meeting has authority to do which are listed under statute.
 - iv. Under page 20 section B, a special town meeting can be called by a petition signed by at least 100 qualified electors, state statute Section 7.1 only requires 20.
 - v. Page 23 Voter Eligibility reads electors “and” taxpayers rather than “or”.

- vi. Page 24: suggested allowing the Board of Selectmen to call for a vote if there is a controversy or the taxpayers want it.
 - vii. Page 25 Emergency Appropriations allows the First Selectman to decide an emergency event and the Board of Finance are the only ones required to acknowledge the emergency.
 - viii. Section 7.348 of state statutes reads that the town is not to contract in excess of appropriation, town meeting to increase amount. Noted section of statute which restricts additional appropriations to \$20,000 without going to town meeting, also noting penalty for violation in section 7.349.
 - ix. Page 27 Emergency Ordinance bypasses town meeting and should be eliminated, noted FOI has provisions for emergency meetings.
 - x. Page 29 section 3.7 Easements Right of Way and Temporary Construction access should be in the planning and zoning regulations rather than the charter.
 - xi. Section 3.9 includes proposed increase of appropriation threshold to require a town meeting to and arbitrary amount of \$1 million. This reduces participation of the legislative body. Suggested option Marlborough, CT implemented where threshold is 2% of operating budget.
 - xii. Section 5.11 Organizations, Qualifications, and Meetings of the Board of Finance. Noted elected position of secretary is generally an honorary position and many boards will hire a recording secretary if necessary.
 - xiii. Page 38 requires an auditor be hired in accordance with the Town's procurement policy but the Town's procurement policy exempts auditors from following the policy.
 - xiv. Page 42 proposed draft sets \$14,000 threshold for town meeting for special appropriation, reiterated \$20,000 limit by statute.
 - xv. Page 49 states the town "shall" be a member of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, which implies the town must do so. However, there is no penalty or recourse. Section 6.3 states the town "may" participate in DMIAAB.
 - xvi. Page 55 states conservation commission members will be appointed by First Selectman rather than Board of Selectmen as a whole. Questioned increasing Selectmen while reducing duties.
 - xvii. Suggested removing library section on page 63. Noted agencies such as the Library Board, Fire Trustees, etc all go through the procurement process for projects and serve as the building committee for their projects.
 - xviii. Definitions section: requested clarification on the definition of "Town."
 - xix. Page 65 previously read that the Board of Selectmen shall appoint an Emergency Management Director rather than only the First Selectman.
 - xx. Expressed opposition to the proposed Town Administrator and proposed appointed Tax Collector and Town Clerk, noting that staff cannot be discussed at a meeting while elected officials can.
 - xxi. Suggested the commission add consequences if the charter is stating provisions "must" or "shall" be done.
 - xxii. Suggested the commission only make minor changes to the original charter rather than completely reconstituting the document
- h. **Kristin Higgins, PALS Board of Directors member:** Stated that library board was not consulted for charter revision. Expressed concern that the commission only has 7 days to make changes after public hearing. Expressed that the library should not be changed

- i. **Jerry Bruckner, Fire Trustees member:** noted that Chapter 8, section 6.9 states that the language which states vacancies are filled by special town meeting does not account for trustees who are hired from the fire department. Supports keeping Town Clerk, Tax Collector, and Treasurer as elected positions. Expressed concern for town administrator and personnel changing after elections based on political party. Does not support Compensation Review and Personnel Policy Board change to ad-hoc committee
- j. **Gwen Wirger, Library Board of Trustees member:** Echoed comments of other Library Board members. Stated section 16.15 language is adversarial considering the Board of Library trustees has historically not done anything outside the bounds of State Statutes. Proposed charter gives the First Selectman authority to hire, oversee, and remove the Library director, a power which is given to the Library Board by Statute. Conflict of charter and State Statute will cause debate. Understands intent of the Charter Review Commission, but language included in draft does not reflect intent
- k. **Anne Mueller, Library Board of Trustees member:** Sections in the proposed charter allow the town manager/administrator to hire and fire staff. Expressed that Library Board has done an excellent job hiring staff. Discussed experience on interview committees for assistant library director. Potential candidate may not take a position where they can be fired at the whim of a town administrator. Suggested the commission revise the language on hiring of library staff.
- l. Charter Commission noted that the proposed language refers to statute and the charter is a town wide document. Requested clarification on how the Library Board would like their section of the charter to reference their statutory powers
- m. **Kristen Kleeman, resident and chair of Fire Trustees:** reiterated that the Fire Trustees were not communicated with. Expressed that in Charter Revision meetings some members are pushing the charter in one direction and making the decisions while the others are quiet. Stated that the removal of the treasurer would remove checks and balances
- n. **Frank DeFelice, Chair of Planning and Zoning Commission and Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency:** Noted that Inland Wetlands and Watercourses is an Agency, not a board or commission, as is stated in the state statutes. Recommended adding language to include agencies. Section 6.4 in the draft language states that the day to day supervision of the Zoning Enforcement Officer shall be in accordance with the town's administrative structure. By statute, the ZEO reports to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Expressed that the proposed \$1 million threshold for referendum is too high, suggested 500,000 or 300,000. Draft document requires the use of town counsel, certain land use boards need the ability to use specialized legal counsel. Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands were not invited to Charter Revision meetings. Expressed that Durham is too small for a Town Administrator, and the position would cost a significant amount of money during a time when the town is having budget issues. Suggested removing sections 9 and 10

- o. **MaryAnn Board:** reiterated George Eames's comment that under the proposed charter, there would only be one elected employee in Town Hall. Four selectmen and town administrator would cause budget impact. Questioned how accountable staff would be to the community. Noted that Town Administrator is not required to be a Town resident
- p. **Jenny Luce, Brewster School Librarian and immediate past president of CT Association of School Librarians, Intellectual Freedom Committee:** Expressed concern for proposed language, echoed concerns of other library board members. Named other states where issues of removal of library materials and programs have occurred such as Texas, Florida, and Oklahoma. Stated that she has received threats after attending public hearings and her colleagues have received death threats for being librarians. Offered her help and invited the commission to ask further questions
- q. **Debra DeFelice:** supports elected Town Clerk, Tax Collector, and Treasurer. Noted many boards have specific rules for the filling of vacancies. Some boards hire secretaries for minutes, however the proposed charter requires a member of the board or commission to take minutes. Expressed charter should not remove abilities from Boards or voters
- r. **Christine Michaud, resident and former Library Director:** Supports independent oversight by library board of library operations including staffing decisions, collection development, and the administrator of library services. Independence helps ensure professional library standards and intellectual freedom. Urged the commission to clarify the charter language to affirm the Board of Trustees' independent authority over library operations while eliminating any conflicting provisions that create confusion. Noted that while the charter is a general document, there is opportunity for confusion and the charter should be more specific about where authority lies
- s. **Roger Kleeman, Compensation Review Personnel Policy Board Member:** Disagrees with the removal of the Compensation Review Personnel Policy Board. CRPPB currently does not have enough members and has not been given any duties. Proposed charter removes control and checks and balances. Expressed concern for conflict of interest paying town counsel for review of a document that a member of the law firm who sits on the commission wrote. Noted that a member who works for Halloran and Sage voted on payment of a bill to Halloran and Sage. Suggested removing redline sections and reducing length of the document. The draft charter does not include consequences for when the charter is not followed. A town administrator was scheduled to attend a charter revision meeting but never attended. Asked how many hours the town administrator will work, and how overtime will be handled.
- t. **Chuck Stengel:** Disagrees with removal of Treasurer, position separates workload.
- u. **Lynn Johnson, Vice President of Library Board of Trustees:** Board member for 40 years and previous president of PALS. Noted that the Library Board replied to the Charter Revision survey that no changes were needed. Board was only made aware of proposed changes after reading meeting minutes. Noted that the Library Board operates not only under town charter but under specific state statutes, board bylaws,

and policies. Board made recommendations in writing and in public comment and has not had any in depth conversation with the Charter Revision Commission. Library Boards and Libraries are treated differently from other boards and commissions because libraries need to remain independent. Library Boards has made written recommendations, urged the commission to review those changes.

- v. **Lynn Allen:** Expressed support for the library. Stated that if the commission's intent is to have a welcoming and inclusive library, that should be accounted for in the charter language, because State Statutes can change
- w. **Karen Buckley:** Expressed support for the library and their impact on the community. 7 days is an ambitious timeline to make changes based on feedback, cited experience drafting legislation. Suggested the commission enroll other boards, commissions, and departments into the charter review process. Encouraged the commission to have legal counsel review the draft language alongside bylaws for boards and commissions. Language should be explicitly clear and exceptions or things that should be treated differently should be carved out. Noted that definition of emergency in draft language includes public health and safety emergencies as well as maintenance. Questioned whether maintenance includes tasks such as changing a light bulb or something such as a major floor. Suggested modifying definitions to draw a distinction between one maintenance concern and another. Noted internal conflicts in the document regarding how property and donations are handled
- x. **Eric Infeld, Library Board of Trustees Secretary:** Expressed support for the library and discussed how the Library Board of Trustees supports the library through fundraising, strategic planning, and revitalizing spaces. Suggested commission: delete proposed section 7.8 or revise it as the Board of Trustees requested. Delete section 7.9 with regards to the library as it is unnecessary. Revise the charter to reflect the Library Boards's responsibility towards Library personnel including their responsibility to hire, supervise, evaluate, and remove the Library Director
- y. **Marie Wilde, Chair of Compensation Review and Personnel Policy Board:** Expressed disappointment that CRPPB is removed in the draft charter. Board is currently underutilized, several positions have been posted without their input. Noted that Charter Revision sent surveys to other boards and commissions and those survey responses were never discussed. Stated that the previous selectman on the Charter Revision Commission geared decisions towards making the Selectman positions easier. Suggested the commission keep guardrails and checks and balances
- z. **Katie Reddick, President of PALs:** Speaking as a resident. Suggested an additional public forum. Expressed support for the Library. The legal wording of the draft charter is difficult to read and understand
- aa. **Josh Miller, Conservation Commission member and Tree Warden:** expressed that adding a town administrator will create additional buffers from the public, which will lead to a less accountable government. Urged the town to remove the town administrator portion of the document. Supports expanding the board of selectmen

- bb. **Richard Parmelee:** Expressed opposition to increasing the spending limit from \$20,000 to \$40,000 and the \$100,000 limit to \$1 million. Does not support a town administrator. Would like to see the Treasurer position maintained to retain checks and balances and to not increase the Finance Director's workload. Stated that the previous town budget meetings were not informative. The salary for the Finance Director was not listed. Facilities Director was hired without consulting the Compensation Review Personnel Policy Board. Expressed support for the library and that the draft charter will take the government away from the people

- cc. **Nick Charest, Town Clerk:** Expressed concern for the decision to change elected positions to appointed, did not feel the options were explored. Also concerned that putting the Town Clerk under the authority of the Town Administrator could cause issues if the Town Clerk needs to override the administrator to adhere to State Statute. Requested clarity on how an assistant town clerk would be hired or fired to avoid interference from the selectmen or town administrator. Noted that town hall staff often interpret the charter and if residents find it difficult to understand it should be clarified to avoid future confusion and to help residents understand the operations of the town. Agreed with other commenters' support for the library. Suggested a plan be made for the Compensation Review Board or that a HR consultant be brought in. The accusations of insidious hiring practices and overcompensation cause stress as an employee

3. Written Public Comment:

- a. **Katie Tietjen:** expressed support for the library
- b. **Karen Cheyney:** wrote on the topic of the Registrar of Voters, suggested a separate section to outline that they operate by state statute
- c. **Ryan Wirger:** Expressed support for the library

4. Next Meeting- May 20, 2026

5. Adjourn

MOTION BY MARTIN ANDERSON SECONDED BY SEVERAL TO ADJOURN. ALL AYE

Meeting adjourned at 9:40pm,
Respectfully submitted,
Nick Charest