

## **FRIENDS OF THE CHARTER LOOK FORWARD TO BETTER TOWN GOVERNMENT!!**

**YES! -- We're IN FAVOR of the Charter – and YOU probably should be, too!**

**We have confidence in the Commission**—They were elected by the Town. Everyone says they are good, smart people. Between them, they have over 350 years of residency in the town. They worked almost a year on the project, and this is their unanimous recommendation. Unanimous. Not 7-2, like back in 2004. In a Republic, voters choose trusted men/women to represent their interests and devote the time and study that the people cannot. This is what we have done by electing the commission. Now we must have some confidence in their recommendations.

**The Charter addresses the issues we told them were important** – The commission held 3 public hearings and multiple visits with Town officials and boards. They heard our concerns that the lack of coordination, cooperation and communication between boards and departments made dealing with the town on any issue very cumbersome and frustrating. We asked for a more streamlined process. They heard our concern about the lack of prompt decision-making and action by the Town Administrator, and they noted that the last two administrators had resigned in frustration over that issue. They heard that the Town meeting was ill-attended, too infrequent, too inefficient, and obsolete. They heard a strong request for more opportunities for citizens to address town officials, and to file petitions, and for recall of rogue officials. Overall, the citizens said they wanted major changes, professional management, more accountability and faster decisions and action. The Town Council/Town Manager structure is responsive to all these concerns, not just one or two. It's about a whole lot more than 2 rogue selectmen.

**The state only allows FIVE structures** – You can't mix and match. The other structures are not as appealing. A mayor does not require special training or education. S/he runs a political campaign and gets elected. S/he cannot be fired. Recall is very difficult. By contrast, the charter provides that the town council (who *are* elected) must consider as candidates for town manager only professionals with relevant training and education. A town manager who "goes rogue" can be fired by the council, without requiring an election or a recall. Another option involves electing town meeting *members*, and so the beloved town meeting goes away anyway under that option. The only options with an open town meeting are the one we have today, or the selectmen/strong manager/town meeting that the voters rejected in 2005. Only the Town Council/Town Manager option responds to the issues we asked them to solve.

**The Town Manager/Town Council structure is in use by some 50 communities** -- It's all across Massachusetts. It's not new and untried. It's not an automatic opening to fraud and corruption. It's much more appropriate to a \$52 million budget town. It's a more responsive, flexible and efficient form of government than what we have today.

**The Town Meeting is a wonderful idea, but it is both broken and obsolete** – For a \$52 million Town to be controlled by 100-300 citizens is not representative government. We have reduced the quorum several times, it is now 150 people for Annual Town Meeting and 100 people for a Special Town Meeting. We often have to wait a half-hour just to get that quorum. A full 50 or so attendees are already part of the town government, so we're really only including 100-150 additional townspeople. Half of the agenda items are either routine or trivial, and should never require being brought to the floor in the first place. Gadflies waste precious time. Voters' legitimate questions and concerns are often not fully responded to due to lack of data or experts at the meeting. Single-issue voter blocks show up, control their pet issue, and then walk out. While the meeting obsesses over small dollar amounts for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade and Animal

Control. These are facts. Maybe there are some fixes for the Town Meeting, but we will always be fighting citizen inattention, lack of information, voter distraction and apathy.

**The Charter actually enhances voters' rights in many ways** – The voters will be able to elect 7 Councilors instead of 3 Selectmen. Although the 1 or 2 town meetings would be gone, the Charter would provide for the right of any citizen to address the seven councilors for a minimum of 12 times a year. Rather than just speaking at town meeting and hoping somebody might do something about an issue, if the councilors fail to respond, citizens would have new rights of petition and referendum, by which they could force change, just as they can today, but now only once a year at the town meeting. The charter even provides a measure by which voters can force suspension of a measure already passed by the council pending a citizen vote to overturn it. If a councilor proves unsuited to the task, or goes rogue, s/he can be recalled, unlike today. And it would take 4 councilors going rogue to take over the town, unlike just two today.

**The Charter contains a recall provision** – Even before the current two selectmen took over the town, we had experienced multiple problems with multiple selectmen. With just 3 selectmen, the constant turnover of one-term selectmen made the town inefficient, uncoordinated and slow to act. The citizens raised this issue with the commission long before the town takeover on March 15, 2016. There is an effort underway to add a recall provision thru Town Meeting. That will require a vote at Town meeting, then require both houses of the state legislators to approve the language and then back now another town-wide vote. It might take a year or longer. Or it might not happen at all. Why not vote yes on Charter and have the Recall provision immediately take effect.

**There are provisions for a smooth transition** – All current bylaws remain in force. Currently elected board members would serve out their terms, with the exception of the Board of Selectmen. Each board would have the same number of members as they do currently. Town employees would remain in their jobs unless those jobs are affected by a reorganization under the Town Manager. The 2017 fiscal year budget will be approved at this May's Town Meeting. In the future the budget will be created by the Town Manager & then needs to be approved by Town Council.

### **A lot of opposition to the Charter is unduly pessimistic, misinformed, or emotional.**

- The main purpose of the Charter is not to eliminate the selectmen or the Town Meeting; it's to give the town a 21<sup>st</sup> century structure that will be more efficient, more cooperative, and more responsive to the people.
- The Town Manager will have the powers necessary to ensure that all boards and departments of the Town coordinate, cooperate and communicate with each other in serving the public's needs. But his/her power will be limited by the council, who as legislators will set the policies the manager must follow or be fired.
- There IS a residency requirement for the Town Manager. Charter was made so that the residency issue could be waived by the Council if they believed it to be in the best interest of the Town.
- The Charter is not fixed in stone; the council can amend it at any meeting if something's not working, and the charter requires a complete review in just four years. Today, there is no requirement for any review.
- The budget process, the zoning bylaws, will actually have more and broader oversight than today.
- There is only ONE new position being added; the other "new" positions may be filled by current municipal employees..

**BOTTOM LINE** – If you believe that the town will vote for seven corrupt or incompetent councilors, who will hire one corrupt or incompetent town manager, then you must vote NO, and retain the corrupt and incompetent leadership we have now. But if you think the voters will elect honest, intelligent councilors who love our town and will work to improve it, join us in voting optimistically for change. Vote YES . . . !

[www.eastlongmeadowweather.org](http://www.eastlongmeadowweather.org) and Facebook: Home Rule Charter

Paid for by the East Longmeadow Home Rule Charter: Susan J. Grimaldi, Chair