

Minutes of the Town of East Montpelier Charter Committee
Wednesday, May 8, 2013
7:00 pm at the Municipal Building

Present

Jack Pauly
Julie Potter
Karen Gramer
Edie Miller
Richard Brock
Ed Deegan
Rick Mastelli
Norman Hill
Kim Watson
Carl Etnier (recording secretary)

A. Call to Order

Carl Etnier opened the meeting on behalf of the Selectboard at 7:02 pm.

B. Additions to the Agenda

None.

C. Public Comment

None.

D. Committee Organization

The committee unanimously elected the following officers:

Chair: Edie Miller

Vice chair: Richard Brock

Secretary: Carl Etnier

E. Review of Town Governance Methodology

The committee discussed how charters work and the process for adopting them. The material in the handout, from Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) and The Vermont Institute for Government, explain in some detail. The basic timeline is to warn a charter for 2014 Town Meeting, after which it would need to be approved by the legislature. Mr. Etnier suggested that the charter request would not likely get much attention in the legislature before the 2015 session.

Ms. Miller volunteered to create and send out a document showing the process in bullets and timeline

A committee member asked what the trigger was for considering a charter now. Ms. Miller, a former Selectboard member, explained that the Selectboard had talked about it off and on for years in various contexts, and that a desire to give the Selectboard the ability to select and evaluate a treasurer was the immediate trigger. Treasurer Don Welch recommended in his report to the 2013 Town Meeting that the Town consider a charter change for an appointed treasurer. Mr. Etnier, a current Selectboard member, concurred with that explanation.

The committee discussed its charge from the Selectboard:

The East Montpelier Charter Committee shall consider the advantages and disadvantages of East

Montpelier adopting a town charter, including one or more of the following provisions:

- *The following officers to be appointed by the Selectboard*
 - *Treasurer*
 - *Delinquent tax collector (possibly a duty of the treasurer)*
 - *Town law agent*
 - *Town grand juror*
 - *Planning Commission*
 - *Listers*
- *The Zoning Administrator serves at will, or for a one-year term (currently three years)*
- *The town shall have the power to adopt and enforce ordinances establishing systems or regulations for signs and billboards*
- *A conflict-of-interest policy that does not rely on voluntary compliance*
- *The Selectboard members serve as Trustees of Public Funds*
- *Funding Request Article on Warning always an "on the floor" article regardless of total article amount*
- *Social/Environmental funding requests under \$3,000 (or whatever amount) must go through Funding Request Committee process; no petition option; no allowance for Selectboard placement on Warning*
- *A town manager or expanded town administrator form of government*

The Committee shall, as part of its process, gather input from the public and report to the Selectboard by December 1, 2013.

The committee brainstormed criteria for deciding whether to recommend an item for inclusion in the charter and suggested the following:

Does it help the Selectboard more effectively exercise its ultimate responsibility for town affairs?

Does one need a certain skill set to carry out those officers' positions?

Would it enhance the performance of the officer to have annual performance review?

Does it solve a problem that we have currently or have had in the past?

Is it consistent with democratic control?

Is there a downside to the inclusion?

Keep it simple.

Ms. Potter raised the issue of whether the charter should make provisions for things we need not now, but expect to in the future.

When the time comes, we will invite a neutral expert, e.g., from VLCT, to discuss the issues connected with going to a town manager or expanded town administrator form of government.

Mr. Brock suggested involving State Rep. Tony Klein in our discussions early on.

Assignment for next meeting: Think about various town officers that we might wish to be appointed.

Ms. Miller asked for a sense of the meeting: "Is there anyone here who thinks we would be wasting our time looking at a charter?" No one spoke up.

The committee discussed a timeline for meeting the Selectboard's charge of submitting a draft charter to them by December 1. Having a draft document by October 1 was discussed. There was some discussion of public hearings--perhaps the committee will hold one exploratory hearing before drafting any language and one hearing after an initial charter is drawn up. The committee also discussed how to

integrate its hearings with the statutorily required Selectboard hearings.

The committee discussed announcing the agenda of its individual meetings on places like Front Porch Forum and inviting townspeople to attend, but no assignment was made to do that for next meeting.

The committee will hold its meetings on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 7:00 pm in the town office, with next meeting May 22.

Mr. Etnier will inform Town Administrator Bruce Johnson of the committee's schedule and ask him to warn or notice the meetings as required.

Ms. Miller will invite Don Welch, Mr. Etnier will invite Jane Burroughs to the next meeting, and Mr. Mastelli will invite head auditor Deborah Fillion to the meeting. Mr. Etnier and Mr. Mastelli will report back to Ms. Miller quickly about whether their invitees are available and willing to come on that date.

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 pm.