

**Town of Hooksett  
Charter Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, April 26, 2023**

1  
2 The Hooksett Town Charter Subcommittee met on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, at 5:00 in the Hooksett  
3 Municipal Building.

4  
5 **CALL TO ORDER**

6 Chair Durand called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

7  
8 **PROOF OF POSTING**

9 Chair Durand provided proof of posting.

10

11 **In Attendance:** Councilor James Sullivan, Councilor David Boutin, and Councilor John Durand

12 Staff Support: André Garron and Wendy Baker

13

14 Supervisors of the Checklist Mike Horne and Barb Brennan were welcomed in for their appointment to  
15 discuss the pros and cons of having districts in Hooksett.

16

17 Mike Horne brought in a map of the districts for display.

18

19 Chair Durand – We would like to know what you think the pros and cons of having districts are.

20

21 M. Horne – As a Supervisor of the Checklist, I can tell you eliminating the districts would take away a  
22 big chore that we do every 10 years, which is rebalancing the districts after the census has taken place.

23

24 D. Boutin – What do you see as advantages of having districts and the shortcomings if we didn't have  
25 districts?

26

27 M. Horne – Speaking as a Supervisor of the Checklist, the districts complicate town elections and in the  
28 case with the Town Clerk, there are costs incurred. We had residents move within the town last year  
29 and moved into a new district and we had to catch that and make sure to transfer them and give them  
30 the correct ballot.

31

32 Chair Durand referenced the chart that has similar sized towns and whether they have districts or not  
33 and he said looking at it, it looks like the majority of towns do not have districts.

34

35 B. Brennan – I believe the intent of it was to not have too many residents from one area on the Council.

36

37 Chair Durand – Currently it is possible to have two Councilors in one district.

38

39 D. Boutin – The At Large Councilors are representing the whole town.

40

41 A. Garron – What if there would be a reduction in the number of Councilors, how would that effect the  
42 districts?

43

44 B. Brennan – You would eliminate the At Large seats.

45

46 M. Horne – It depends how you work it unless you say you can't have more than one Councilor in each  
47 district and that might mean you have a district without a Councilor if you made it fewer than six.

48

49 Chair Durand – We are almost the only town on this list that has districts.  
50  
51 M. Horne – It does cause complications with the voting system because the form has wards and we  
52 have to tell people to disregard that. It confuses the voters.  
53  
54 Chair Durand – It’s obvious from this list that it’s not an issue to not have districts.  
55  
56 D. Boutin – Does anyone know why we created districts?  
57  
58 Chair Durand – We just talked about that, it’s because of Granite Hill.  
59  
60 J. Sullivan – There were concerns when it was created, creating districts because of Granite Hill  
61 Development, Municipal Budget Act and Zoning Issues.  
62  
63 J. Sullivan – In regards to the Supervisors of the Checklist eliminating districts would take away the 10  
64 year requirement of rebalancing the districts, would lessen confusion at elections and would not need to  
65 create and print multiple ballots.  
66  
67 M. Horne – There would be a cost saving savings with not having multiple ballots.  
68  
69 J. Sullivan – asked M. Horne and B. Brannan – What is your point of view on the districts as citizens?  
70  
71 B. Brennan – Eliminate them.  
72  
73 M. Horne – It gives you more flexibility to get people to be Councilors.  
74  
75 M. Horne – The only elected officials that have to be elected by the districts are the Town Councilors.  
76  
77 J. Sullivan – I am leaning towards eliminating the districts but maybe not decreasing the number of  
78 councilors because of the subcommittee memberships that have to be filled. Eliminating districts would  
79 promote more to run and maybe we can change the rule to say 3 can be from one district instead of  
80 only 2.  
81  
82 Chair Durand – That might cause more confusion.  
83  
84 D. Boutin – What is the disadvantage of districts as they exist and how does it negatively impact the  
85 town.  
86  
87 Chair Durand – Limitation of who can run for office and when, I just don’t see the need for it.  
88  
89 D. Boutin – That is not a sufficient answer.  
90  
91 Chair Durand – That is my answer for now and obviously there is not an issue with it in other towns. It  
92 started more than 30 years ago because there was an issue in one area and sometimes it is just time  
93 for a change. I don’t understand why you are on this committee since you don’t want to eliminate  
94 councilors or raise the stipend.  
95  
96 D. Boutin – I don’t know how you came to those conclusions.  
97  
98 Chair Durand – All of those things you have said to me and have said them at other public meetings.  
99

100 A verbal disagreement ensued which resulted in D. Boutin stepping down from the seat on this  
101 subcommittee and he exited the meeting.  
102  
103 J. Sullivan read an email from former Town Clerk, Todd Rainier which includes his thoughts on districts.  
104  
105 “Many, if not most, residents have no idea what district they reside in (we all know this fact). This  
106 causes delays, confusion, and frustration to voters on municipal election days.  
107  
108 There are real costs associated with the additional typesetting for multiple ballot types and additional  
109 races. We have invoices for many previous years, although they are all for town elections only, and will  
110 not show what savings would be realized.  
111  
112 The Accuvote memory card coding to properly read votes on a more complex ballot is more expensive.  
113 Time spent by Clerk and Deputy Clerk tracking ballots across multiple districts is extensive for all  
114 elections, and much, much more for larger elections. While one could argue these roles are  
115 elected/appointed and there is no actual monetary figure attached for their time (or overtime), I would  
116 vehemently argue the fatigue incurred is very real and has a cost, even if not monetary.  
117  
118 This complexity added to the absentee ballot process follows each and every absentee ballot, from  
119 date of request through the casting of each ballot by the Moderator on election day.  
120  
121 In 2020, NH Secretary of State attempted to attach a monetary figure to each absentee ballot based  
122 upon the time the Clerk and Moderator spend with each ballot through the process. The handling time  
123 involved was calculated at around 30 minutes *for each absentee ballot*. Hooksett is likely much more,  
124 as a result of the districts.”  
125  
126 Chair Durand asked if they would be able to figure out the cost savings?  
127  
128 J. Sullivan – Before we make our recommendation to the Council, should we have a Public Hearing at  
129 the next subcommittee meeting to get public input? I would be in favor of recommending no districts,  
130 reducing the Council to 7, change the quorum requirement to a simple majority and increase the  
131 stipend for each by \$500 which brings them to \$2,000 each and \$2,500 for the chair. The total increase  
132 would be only \$500 total for budget purposes.  
133  
134 J. Sullivan – Original members of the Charter Commission did come forth at a public meeting and said  
135 that it may be time to look at removing districts. I would ask that someone send a letter to Mary Farwell  
136 and Mr. Riley asking them for insight and thoughts on eliminating the districts as well as asking them  
137 why they were created.  
138  
139 J. Sullivan said if the consensus is to keep districts but decrease the Council to 7, then maybe having 4  
140 district seats and 3 At Large seats would be better, although that might make it more difficult for At  
141 Large seats to run if you only allow two per district.  
142  
143 Chair Durand – We want to have at least one more meeting to get information from those that created  
144 the districts.  
145  
146 J. Sullivan – We should establish what we are in favor of which is no districts, 7 Councilors, \$500  
147 increase for each stipend (at 7 Councilors) and a simple majority of 4.  
148  
149 Chair Durand – I agree.  
150

151 J. Sullivan – We need to formulate our suggestions and hold a Public Hearing at our next subcommittee  
152 meeting.  
153  
154 A. Garron – You may hear the pros and cons and still want to bring it forth to the whole Council to  
155 decide even if you have more negative than positive on the changes.  
156  
157 J. Sullivan – Would it be appropriate to reach out to someone in Bedford and Newmarket to ask how  
158 they do with no districts?  
159  
160 Chair Durand asked Andre to reach out to the Town Managers in those towns.  
161  
162 It was decided to have the next meeting on May 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm and to advertise for a Public Hearing at  
163 this meeting.  
164  
165 ***Councilor Sullivan motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Seconded by Chair Durand.***  
166  
167 ***All in favor 2-0***  
168  
169 **ADJOURNMENT**  
170  
171 ***Chair Durand motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:01 pm. Seconded by Councilor Sullivan.***  
172  
173 ***All in favor 2-0***  
174  
175 Respectfully submitted,  
176  
177 *Wendy Baker*  
178  
179 Wendy Baker  
180 Executive Assistant