

**Town of Hooksett  
Charter Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, May 18, 2023**

1  
2 The Hooksett Town Charter Subcommittee met on Thursday, May 18, 2023, at 6:00 in the Hooksett  
3 Municipal Building.

4  
5 **CALL TO ORDER**

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

7  
8 **PROOF OF POSTING**

9 Chair Durand provided proof of posting.

10

11 **In Attendance:** Councilor James Sullivan and Councilor John Durand

12 Staff Support: André Garron

13

14 Chair Durand opened the Public Hearing.

15

16 Chair Durand read off a hand-out that gave the 4 changes and reasons for seeking these changes.

17

18 **Eliminating Districts**

- 19
- 20 • Would eliminate the 10-year requirement of the Supervisors of the Checklist to rebalance the districts
  - 21 • The confusion and cost of multiple ballots
  - 22 • Gives more flexibility for residents to run for Town Council because there is a limitation of who can run and when
- 23

24 Councilor Sullivan said under the current Charter it restricts for there to be only 2 per district and when  
25 the recent vacancy of an At Large position came up, there was already a built-in restriction of which  
26 districts they could be from. The initial reasons for the districts was because there was concern that  
27 one area would control the Council.

28

29 **Reducing Town Council from 9 to 7 members**

- 30
- 31 • Meetings go on longer with more personalities
  - 32 • Easier to make quorum

33 Councilor Sullivan said there was some discussion about reducing to 5 members but because there are  
34 10 standing committees that Council members serve on that would require them more time out on  
35 these committees attending their meetings. He also said the School Board has increased from 5 to 7  
36 members recently and it seems to work well.

37

38 Chair Durand referred to research done showing that most towns with a similar population as Hooksett  
39 are at a lower number.

40

41 **Change the Quorum to a simple majority**

- 42 • Many meetings we have trouble having a quorum and starting on time having to have a super majority.

43 Councilor Sullivan said that the current super majority is 6 members and we are suggesting a simple  
44 majority that would bring it lower at either 9 or 7 member Council.

45

46 **Increase the Town Council stipend by \$500**

- 47 • Stipend has not increased in a long time and many other Town's have one that is higher
- 48 • Entice candidates to run and reward them for their time

49 Councilor Sullivan said it would bring it up to \$2,000 for Council Members and \$2,500 for the Chair.

50

51 Jim Michaud said he has read the minutes from the 2 subcommittee meetings and Wendy Baker also  
52 sent me the document with the listings of other communities and I am in favor of Council reducing to 7  
53 members but wouldn't want to go less than that. He said he does have concern about the West side if  
54 districts are eliminated they could potentially have no representation.

55

56 Councilor Sullivan said he does believe that is a reason why the districts were created with Granite Hills  
57 being developed. That is possible that the West side wouldn't be represented and we are not sure of  
58 the procedure yet on how to go from 9 to 7.

59

60 J. Michaud asked if there was a statutory mechanism?

61

62 Councilor Sullivan said we are not sure and need to look into that. The question is if the council is  
63 reduced to 7 but districts are not eliminated, how do we handle that?

64

65 Chair Durand said the other reason to eliminate the districts is because the Supervisors of the Checklist  
66 have stated that it costs more to print ballots etc. Also my hope is that by eliminating them it will allow  
67 more competition, we have had so many elections with candidates running unopposed.

68

69 J. Michaud asked does the simple majority change need to be done through the Charter?

70

71 Councilor Sullivan answered yes.

72

73 J. Michaud said he is favor of changing to a simple majority or whatever the number is and in favor of  
74 the adjustment to stipend.

75

76 Mary Farwell said she checked with Don Riley since they were both on the original Charter Committee,  
77 to make sure her recollections were similar and yes, Granite Hills was coming on board at that point in  
78 time and the residents were concerned that because you had so many residents in a concentrated area  
79 that there could be the possibility that a coalition of people might take the majority of seats and vote in  
80 their favor, but that did not happen. She went on to say that because of this, she feels it did a  
81 disservice to the town because there were some years they could not get anyone to run from a  
82 particular district. She said she is very much in favor of eliminating the districts and the expectation  
83 should be that every Councilor should represent all the residents.

84

85 Chair Durand said he whole heartedly agrees!

86

87 M. Farwell asked Councilor Sullivan if the fact that the School Board wasn't voted on via districts, has  
88 that ever had an effect of someone feeling like they didn't have representation??

89

90 Councilor Sullivan said no, there have not been any issues regarding representation for the School  
91 Board.

92

93 M. Farwell said she does agree with reducing Council from 9 to 7 members and how will you deal with  
94 that if the Town votes yes on that and no on eliminating the districts?

95

96 Councilor Sullivan said that is still something that we need to figure out before bringing it to Council for  
97 consideration.

98

99 M. Farwell said she also agrees that 5 members would be too few and that 7 is a good number. She  
100 said she agrees with changing to a simple majority and increasing the stipend as well. She then asked  
101 if all 4 amendments are voted through next March, when would it take place?  
102  
103 Councilor Sullivan said, if the vote took place in 2024 and passed, this amendment would take place in  
104 2025.  
105  
106 M. Farwell asked if the number of districts can be changed by the Council or is that in the Charter as  
107 well?  
108  
109 Councilor Sullivan said it is in the Charter as 6 districts and we need to find out if there is a mechanism  
110 by which the question can be read, if the vote is to reduce the number of Council members, and  
111 districts are voted to stay, then districts will be re-done as "X". This is something that we need legal  
112 counsel to help with.  
113  
114 Chair Durand said he wondered if the warrant article could read to reduce Council to 7 members with  
115 no districts and if that gets voted down then it would remain the way it is currently. He said he is also in  
116 favor of having all 4 changes listed together for the vote.  
117  
118 Councilor Sullivan said all Charter changes need to go through legal review as well as a review at the  
119 State level before it can go on the ballot.  
120  
121 A. Garron reviewed the process for Charter changes. He said once it concludes at the subcommittee  
122 level it will go to Council for a Public Hearing, then the Council will vote on sending these amendments  
123 to the Secretary of State, the AG's office and the Department of Revenue Administration and they will  
124 collectively send a letter back giving feedback to the Town as well as approving whether they can go to  
125 the ballot if the Council chooses. Once that is done, the Council will vote to put it on the ballot or not.  
126  
127 Councilor Sullivan asked if we can ask legal counsel first for advice on our questions of putting all four  
128 amendments together?  
129  
130 M. Farwell asked how will the Town get the word out to the residents what these changes are all about?  
131  
132 Chair Durand said educating them with the chart we have on other communities. He said he wants to  
133 see more competition.  
134  
135 A. Garron according to the RSA on Charters, Section 49-B:5 it states "each amendment shall be limited  
136 to a single subject, but more than one section of the Charter may be amended as long as it is germane  
137 to that subject". In light of these we should ask legal counsel now how would we work the  
138 amendments on the ballot.  
139  
140 Chair Durand said maybe just the elimination of districts and reduction of council could be put together  
141 and the other two separate.  
142  
143 A Garron wanted to make everyone aware of a change that has happened in the Town of Salem since  
144 the town comparison sheet was made, that they are now have a Town Council versus a Board of  
145 Selectmen with an increase to 9 members, but they are a community of over 30,000.  
146  
147 Councilor Sullivan said the other thing that we need to figure out is if we reduce to 7, how do we go  
148 about that, thru a transition or start from scratch?  
149  
150 Chair Durand suggested that you could ask for volunteers of any that want to resign at that time.

151 Chair Durand thanked Mary Farwell for coming to give her input as a former member of the committee  
152 that put the Charter together.  
153  
154 Chair Durand read the following email from Don Riley who was also a former member of the committee  
155 that put the Charter together.  
156  
157 “Thank you for reaching out to extend an invitation to your public hearing on May 18, 2023.  
158 My opinion as a Hooksett citizen would matter, not as a member of the Charter Commission in 1987-  
159 1988. Because of that association, asking for my opinion could possibly be an inappropriate  
160 request. However, Citizens asking for your opinion or reasons for these change considerations is very  
161 appropriate.  
162 Further, I have committed to myself and my family to participate in only one activity - any local, state or  
163 federal election conducted by the town for as long as I am able contribute.  
164 For these reasons, I must respectfully decline your invitation. Best wishes to the Committee during their  
165 deliberations.  
166 Don Riley”  
167  
168 Chris Lacroix said he understands the thought that the districts make it restrictive for residents to run for  
169 Council and is in favor of changing from 9 to 7 Councilors however, what about the idea of just starting  
170 by eliminating the districts and see how much more competition there is before reducing the Council  
171 membership.  
172  
173 Chair Durand reiterated the reasons for going down to seven were the extended meetings and trouble  
174 getting a quorum.  
175  
176 Chair Durand closed the Public Hearing.  
177  
178 A. Garron said at the last meeting you asked me to ask the Towns of Bedford and Newmarket how they  
179 do with 7 members and no districts. He spoke to Steve Fournier about and they do not have any  
180 issues with representation and no districts other than a while back when there was talk about a new  
181 High School. He said they also do not have issues with having a quorum. The Bedford Town Manager  
182 sent an email that said they have established a Charter Commission but they have elected to study the  
183 move to an official ballot eliminating the budgetary Town Meeting.  
184  
185 Chair Durand said he would like to get more clarification from legal counsel to see if we are able to  
186 group any amendments together.  
187  
188 A. Garron said he will draft what he thinks they are looking for and send it to them before sending to  
189 legal counsel.  
190  
191 Councilor Sullivan said he would be in favor of a letter from the Council to be posted on Facebook to  
192 educate residents on what is trying to be accomplished with these charter amendments as well as  
193 include it in the next newsletter.  
194  
195 Next meeting will be June 28<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm.  
196  
197 ***Councilor Sullivan motion to approve the minutes of April 26, 2023. Seconded by Chair Durand.***  
198 ***All in favor 2-0***  
199  
200 **ADJOURNMENT**  
201

202 **Chair Durand motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:11 pm. Seconded by Councilor Sullivan. All**  
203 **in favor 2-0**  
204  
205 Respectfully submitted,  
206  
207 *Wendy Baker*  
208  
209 Wendy Baker  
210 Executive Assistant