

**The Framingham Charter Proposal: Basics Questions and Answers
from the Communications subcommittee: Janet L, Dennis C, and Adam B**

Q: What is a charter?

A: It is a document that sets up and organizes our government. Think of it like Framingham's constitution

Q: How is the charter document organized?

A: It is divided into eleven sections, called Articles. The first ten set up what our new city-style government would look like, while the last article deals with how we'd transition from our current form of government to this new one. You can find the last draft of the full document [here](#).

Q: What are some of the biggest changes it makes to how decisions are made/ rules are passed?

A: Right now we have a 216 member town meeting where there are rarely contested elections and where some districts, especially some on the south side of town, have nearly as many vacancies as active town meeting members. It meets only 2-3 times a year. The charter replaces this with an eleven member council that would meet at least monthly, if not bi-weekly. Nine of those members would be elected by neighborhood districts, while two "at large members" would be voted via a town-wide vote. This should lead to more competition for seats and for more equal representation across the community. It will also be far easier for voters to know who to turn to in government with their issues and concerns.

Q: What are some of the biggest changes it makes in terms of how decisions are carried out?

A: Right now there are 5 selectman, elected at separate times, who set policies and guidelines for the town, but it is an appointed Town Manager who oversees all the departments and carries out the day to day operations. In the new Charter, an elected Mayor is in charge of this. The Mayor will also have a Chief of Staff presumably with managerial experience to help ensure that daily operations remain smooth. If voters are happy or unhappy with the direction of the town, they can indicate that clearly by their vote for a particular Mayoral candidate.

Q: How do we make sure that one person or group does not get too much power?

A: This is something we've considered carefully and tried to create a charter where the Mayor is neither too strong nor too weak. For example, almost every person the Mayor picks to head parts of the government has to be approved by the council. We've also included a number of features called "citizen relief" measures in case the Council, Mayor or school committee makes decisions residents don't like. These include the power to bring petitions to their boards, to propose specific rules via a town vote, to undo rules recently passed through a community vote, and even to recall officials early if the voters are very upset. By doing this, the charter balances government's ability to work flexibly and efficiently with provisions to make sure that many voices are heard.

Q: “I just want to make sure residents know what the government is doing. Does the Charter address this?”

A. Yes, our Charter has several features, even some aspects others do not, for exactly that reason. It requires all council meetings to be televised and recorded, and also requires that all proposed ordinances and final ordinances be put online before they are considered “in effect”. It also requires a full and accurate budget summary to be online as part of the budget process. This is not the case with budget documents today.

Q: How will we ensure that government officials act ethically?

A. We have chosen to enact the toughest ethics requirements the state provides. This includes a ban on any type of “self-dealing” from any elected official (a rule Town Meeting is currently exempt from following) and more detailed campaign finance reporting than communities our size typically require. This may require some extra work on the part of officials, but will allow residents to know that their officials are truly working for our interests first and foremost.

Q: What happens with the schools and school committee?

A: By state law, the School Committee keeps their main powers to hire the Superintendent of Schools, recommend a budget and set policies. But the Charter makes several changes to structure. The School Committee goes from 7 to 9 people, and they are picked by neighborhood district just like the council. This means people will have one councilor and one school member near them to look to. In the charter, another big change is that the Mayor will be part of the School Committee to encourage collaboration, but he/she will not be a voting member, so he/she doesn’t get too much power in the process.

Q: What happens if changes are needed to the Charter?

A: We didn’t assume that every decision was perfect, so the charter has a provision for an automatic review after five years and every ten years after that.

Q: Does changing to a city form of government automatically more big buildings and development?

A: No. In fact, based on public feedback, we added language to the Charter to keep the same “supermajority” standards needed to approve special permits we have today. This protects Framingham in case state law changes to make it easier for development projects to pass. Like all cities, the planning boards and ZBA are appointed boards. This is another reason we wanted to make sure the council also had a substantial role in approving those selections.

Q What’s the process to approve the Charter?

Ultimately, the choice will be the voters. The Charter will be finalized in mid-January and the voters will vote on April 4th, 2017. It is important for people to get to vote at the regular municipal elections, no matter what their view of the Charter.

Q Where can I find out more and dig into the details?

The proposed charter is online, as are a wide number of support materials, previous drafts, and public comments from throughout the last 8 months at the Charter Commission website documents page. The main Charter commission page also has links to videos of all the meetings.