

GREENFIELD CHARTER CHAPTERS 7-7 & 7-8 REVIEW AD HOC COMMITTEE  
MINUTES

March 22, 2023

Zoom Conferencing System

6:00 p.m.

**CALL TO ORDER** Chairperson Singer called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

**PRESENT** Chairperson Singer, Councilor Golub Committee Members Letourneau, Mass and Norman.

**ABSENT** Councilor Helie.

**CHAIRPERSON STATEMENT:** This meeting was being recorded by the Charter Chapter 7-7 & 7-8 Review Ad Hoc Committee. If any other persons present were doing the same they must notify the chairperson at this time. In accordance with MGLc 30A SS 20(g) "No person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the Chair and all persons shall, at the request of the chair, be silent. No person shall disrupt the proceedings of a meeting of a public body."

**ALSO PRESENT** Members of the public.

**ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES:** On a motion by Committee Member Letourneau, second by Councilor Golub, it was,

**MOVED:** TO ACCEPT THE AD HOC COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2023.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Committee Member Norman, second by Chair Singer, it was,

**MOVED:** TO AMEND THE MINUTES TO ADD LANGAUGE THAT WAS DISCUSSED AT THE JANUARY 12, 2023 MEETING AS FOLLOWS: "THE IDEAS OF ALLOWING VOTERS TO SEEK A REFERENDUM WHEN THE CITY COUNCIL OR SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVES OR DISAPPROVES OF A MEASURE."

It was unanimously,

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2023, AS AMENDED.

Chairperson Singer opened discussion on each Committee members' proposed language for Charter Chapter 7-7: Citizen Initiative Measures and invited each Committee member to provide rationale for their proposals:

- Councilor Golub presented her proposal.
  - An important issue was the process to submit a Citizen's Initiative should be relatively simple.
  - Citizens should demonstrate they were prepared to become organized in order to have an issue passed for placement on the ballot.
  - To present an initiative for Council consideration, a citizen or citizens would be required to gather 150 voter signatures.
  - If Council voted not to pass the initiative, a citizen or citizens would then be required to gather an additional 450 signatures; including 50 from each precinct.
- Committee Member Al Norman presented his proposal
  - The initiative measures needs to be practically usable by the community.
  - The original charter section for initiatives had required 15% of total voters, which today would be approximately 2,000 signatures.
  - Chapter 7-7 of the Charter would be simpler to follow if a numeric amount of signatures was listed as opposed to a percentage of voters who had voted in the last election.
  - To present an initiative for Council consideration, a citizen or citizens would be required to gather not less than 400 signatures.

- The current two step process of initiative and supplemental petitions should be replaced with one simple step that would require no additional signatures to move forward.
- Lack of any process for compromise once the Council rejected an initial petition.
- Language should be into the ordinance that stated “every decennial review (10 years) the number of signatures required could be changed”, which would allow the Charter Review Committee to amend to a number of signatures they believe would be palatable to them.

Further discussion points:

- Concern in regards to the majority of the people who may not like the compromise and may not be able to go forward after because the committee that began the process does not go forward.
  - Concern that the second step of gathering additional signatures would not be presented to the Council and goes to the ballot and did not lead to any compromise.
  - The Council is powerless if there is no supplemental petition and becomes a “take it or leave it” proposition, who would want a government that allowed for ultimatums.
  - More effort should be put towards compromise and coming to the best solution/language proposals for an issue in question as opposed to placing everything brought forward by citizens through initiatives and referendums on the ballot without a more in depth discussion between the Council and petitioners.
- Committee Member Danielle Letourneau presented her proposal.
    - Citizens had other avenues to present proposed changes or other issues to the Council including the use of Charter Chapter 7-6; contact your Precinct Councilor or any At Large Councilor; and approach the Mayor to ask if they could present it to the Council.
    - The process should be simple for a citizen to present an initial petition before the Council; however, a more detailed process should be applied to referendums.
    - Clear language in Charter Sections 7-7 and 7-8 should be simpler to read and understood by citizens interested in filing initial petitions and referendums.
  - Committee Member Isaac Mass presented his proposal.
    - Major concern of a bifurcated system.
    - It should not be easier to have an issue placed on the ballot than to run for public office.
    - Number of signatures required should be similar to signatures needed to run for local elected government positions.
    - Councilors should be given more time to deliberate.
    - The Charter currently did not contain a provision for citizens to place a non-binding referendum on the ballot.

Chairperson David Singer presented his proposal.

- Rationale for retaining the percentage of signatures needed as opposed to a direct number.
- The Charter Review Committee presented two summaries of sections 7-7 & 7-8 to be presented to the City Council; however, they were not discussed.
- The premise for this ad hoc committee was because of the vote in November of 2021 and the fact that people did not want to change 7.8, then why should Section 7-7 be changed.
- Charter Chapter Sections 7-7 and 7-8 were two separate steps of the same process, so what rational could there be to change 7-7 if 7-8 was voted down by the citizens in November of 2021.

Further discussion points:

- Unfair to say that people who voted no on the proposal placed on the ballot were opposed to raising the threshold; it may be that citizens voted not to raise the number of signatures that high.
- It was not in the best interest of Greenfield residents to mirror the same process as the Town of Amherst due to the student population presiding there.
- Was it the consensus of the committee to use direct numbers or continue with percentages?
- Should there continue to be a two step process in Section 7-7 submitting initial and supplemental petitions?

- Numbers used to bring a petition before the Council and to place as issue on the ballot?
- How many days would the Council be given to deliberate?
- Should Charter Sections 7-7 & 7-8 mirror each other as far as process?
- If direct numbers were to be used would the Charter Review Committee be allowed to change those numbers to reflect the number of voters in Greenfield during their decennial review?
- In regards to supplemental petitions, what were people willing to negotiate on?
- How many days should be given to citizens to collect signatures?

The next meeting scheduled for Monday, May 8, 2023, 6:00 pm, via Zoom Conferencing System.

It was the consensus of the Committee to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 pm.