



Charter Change Committee Meeting ***Remote***, Wednesday, August 10th, 2022, 5:30 pm 8/10/2022

CHARTER CHANGE COMMITTEE

Thursday, August 10, 2022

Via Zoom (Remote)

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Councilor Bergman (Chair), Councilor Carpenter, Councilor Traverse

Staff Present: Tim Devlin (Assistant City Attorney), Gillian Nanton (Assistant Director, Community & Economic Development Office (CEDO)), Scott Rogers (CEDO's Community Development Manager).

Others in Attendance:

- Board of Registration of Voters & Ward Clerks and Inspectors: Bernie Carver, Wendy Coe, Jeff Comstock, Mike Hoey, Sal Millichamp, Keith Pullsbury, Keren Turner
- Members of Public: Mike Hoey (WVNY/WFFF; Local 22 & Local 44 News)

Meeting called to order at 5:32 PM.

1.0 Agenda

1.01 Motion to adopt/amend agenda

Motion to Adopt Agenda as is.

Motion by Councilor Carpenter, Seconded by Councilor Bergman

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous (Councilor Traverse not yet present)

2.0 Adopt Minutes from 7/21/2022

Motion to Adopt Minutes from 7/21/2022 without changes.

Motion by Councilor Carpenter, Seconded by Councilor Traverse

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous.

3.0 Public Forum

No comments during the open public forum.



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4.01 Discussion of Consolidation of Polling Places

Councilor Carpenter: proposed changes will only enable not require the consolidation of polling places.

Comments by Ward Clerks and Ward Inspectors:

- Keith Pillsbury: Ward 8 Clerk. Ward 8 was separated from Ward 1. Have moved from Memorial Auditorium to Library Basement. Concerns about crowding which have hampered operations. Now in Library Reading Room, but patrons still there and caused tensions. Does not support consolidation of polling places if Ward 8 voters would have to go to another voter.
- Jeff Comstock: Inspector in Ward 7. Will submit additional comments in writing to committee. Hope that redistricting efforts will solve some problems that Councilor Bergman raised in support of consolidation of polling places. Does not support of consolidation of polling places because will suppress voting. Does not believe that people will continue to ask for early ballots; this was a product of COVID-19. Associate Clerk Sarah Montgomery's data is missing percentage of voters that drop off early ballots at the polls. In Nov 2022, 25% did so. In March 2021 13% did so. March 2022 12% did so. August 2022 3% did so. Consolidation will create overcrowding at polling places on election day as many people will return to voting in public.
- Wendy Coe: Ward 2 Clerk. Does not support consolidation of polling places. Polling places become very crowded. Confusion already exists with voters not knowing what district they are in. Consolidation of multiple districts will create even more confusion. Would like additional data from City Clerk's Office to fill gaps. Fewer people
- Sal Millichamp: Ward 4 Clerk. Open to consolidation. Polling places can already be crowded and disrupted.
- Keren Turner: Ward 4 Inspector. Since COVID-19, noticed more people voting in person. Does not support having voting be conducted in a church; doing so is an overt endorsement of policies of church, e.g. posters that are anti-abortion. Questions posed to Committee: Why is consolidation being considered now? What is important in make decisions in consolidation: costs, access, etc.

Councilor Carpenter: Proposed changes will provide future flexibility to City Council to designate election areas to avoid having intimidating polling places. Will ask Associate Clerk Sarah Montgomery for more detailed data. Today City Council could decide to put all polling places in churches. With instant runoff voting for City Councilors. Could have multiple polling places at same address (e.g. auditorium, high school, etc.). The intent is not to necessarily save money, but instead to provide flexibilities. Not combining polling places per se, but could be locating multiple polling places within the same ward.

Councilor Traverse: Agree with Wendy Coe; the Wards are different. And therefore in support of charter change because does permit flexibility to allow Wards to voluntarily consolidate if those voters want to. For context, this discussion began in context of redistricting proposal that would establish 12 Wards. There are not enough polling places to have 12 polling places, and this would give the flexibility to do so. e.g. if voters in current Ward 5 were to split into 3 different wards, voters likely may still want to vote at the existing polling place at the Burlington Electric Department. Want to strive to lessen confusion and thus less controversy. Thanked Ward Clerks and Ward Inspectors for comments.



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Councilor Bergman: Thanked Ward Clerks and Ward Inspectors for comments. Plenty of time to discuss before Dec deadline. Did not bring item, and do not necessary support it. Important issues of 1) accessibility, and 2) community. Important factor of practicality. The proposed language in § 8 is confusing and should be reexamined.

Comments by Ward Clerks and Ward Inspectors:

- Keith Pullsbury: Represent the emotions of the Ward. Numerous issues in August 2022 Election, including uselessness, new residents. If candidates stand outside polling places, this builds community. Consolidation of polling places undermines the building of community. Suppresses voting because mailing ballots makes some uncomfortable. People like to register to vote in their Ward at their polling places. Lack of trust between voters and councilors.
- Wendy Coe: problem with confusion around term of "consolidation." Are different wards in same ward? Also find the term "election areas" in proposed language in § 8 is confusing.

Councilor Carpenter: Intent was to change physical spot does not have to be in the ward, but could be in two nearby locations, not actually combining the polling locations. The polling place for a ward could be physically moved out of ward but not necessarily combined. Can ask Attorney Devlin to clarify.

Councilor Traverse: See value in change, but also sees value in these comments and will not . Questions: Could Ward Clerks and Inspectors be included in group that determine the placement of polling places? What is the history of trying to find replacement polling places?

Councilor Bergman: Questions posed to election officials present: Do you believe that polling places should have to be within the wards? Do you want to give flexibility to Council to set polling places? Who should constitute the body of who should determine the location of polling places?

- Staff to email these questions to Election Officials and Board of Voter Registration.

Comments by Ward Clerks and Ward Inspectors:

- Wendy Coe: Willing to support flexibility if polling places
- Sal Millichamp: Need more time to think about it, and for more representation.
- Jeff Comstock: want to consult with rest of election team. Likes adding election worker to determination process, even if only in consultation.
- Keren Turner: doesn't feel right to not have voters voter in a place that is not their own ward. Creates a lot of confusion for voters. Support having outside voices. Asks Councilor Bergman to email his questions to election workers.
- Keith Pillsbury: want to discuss with Ward 8 Steering Committee and more time to discuss this.



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4.02 Discussion of Gun Control

- Discussion of 7/29/22 email from Legislative Counsel re "City of Burlington - Procedural Questions re Charter Changes":

Councilor Bergman: Certain Councilors (Bergman, Freeman, and MaGee) support additional steps being taken at the local lever to curb gun violence.

Attorney Devlin: Recitation of substance of email. This email, while applicable to the idea that three previous City charter changes regarding gun issues approved by the voters but did not pass out of committees could be hypothetically be reintroduced in the new biennium legislative session, this email was sent asking the question of 'charter change expiration' in May, but the question was not raised in the context of the gun debate.

Councilor Carpenter: Should this be a new proposal?

Councilor Bergman: Want to bring it through the City's state representatives.

Councilor Traverse: Interested in perhaps a resolution to reignite the three already passed

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 - i. **Discussion of Legal Resident Non-Citizen Voting**

Wendy Coe: For simplicity's sake and to save space, want same check list with different colors, etc.

Discussion of Burlington Communication and Outreach Plan - Legal Resident Non-Citizen Voting - 8.10.22 Final Draft

Councilor Carpenter: Wants proposed language presented to the entire City Council prior to any December deadlines.



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Councilor Bergman: Plans to bring item, via a memo/communication, to City Council on August 15, 2022 and put on deliberative agenda. Could draft a motion seeking approval of direction the proposed language.

Councilor Traverse: Can TD remind the Committee who can advocate for passage of this?

Attorney Devlin: Councilors have much more leeway to advocate, however staff may not and are limited to neutral descriptions and factual consequences.

Councilor Traverse: Appreciates GN's work on matter. Under "Objectives" "(i) Expand democracy and promote more robust democratic practices." May go over the line as far as 'advocating.'

Councilor Bergman: Budget is already accounted for in CEDO budget?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR NANTON: Yes. Also, if CC voices supports, could help specify dates.

Consensus about general framework proposed.

Wendy Coe: On ground practical concerns, specifically about having interpreters available.

4.04 Discussion of Redistricting by Council/Voters

Discussion of Memo to Charter Change Committee re Opposing Items on Ballots - 2022.08.10

Attorney Devlin: Recitation of memo.

Councilor Bergman: Problem with sunset, if people like the existing map.

Councilor Traverse: Putting this on March will confuse voters. Prefers we only advance a Map, and bring this back another year.

Councilor Carpenter: Disagrees that it would be confusing to voters. Prefers to have new redistricting methodology (only involving the City) now. Want the new map to be a binding vote. Advisory Question about new method going forward.

Councilor Traverse: Generally does not like advisory questions.





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Councilor Bergman: Attorney Devlin to draft an advisory question that would include the new redistricting methodology (only involving the City) but avoids sun-setting of metes and bounds language if the voters like the current voting map.

Scheduling of future meetings:

Thursday, August 25th at 6:00PM

Tuesday, September 13th at 5:30PM

5.0 Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn by Councilor Carpenter, Seconded by Councilor Traverse

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 PM.