



June 15, 2023

Greetings,

The work of the Chester Charter Commission has begun and, in an effort to clearly communicate the work being done by the Commission, and to encourage engagement by citizens, this first message will provide background as to why Chester is examining its municipal structure, share progress to date, provide direct links to the Commission meeting minutes and reference documents, and an upcoming meeting schedule.

Governance Study Committee

In August of 2022, the Board of Selectmen formed a study committee to identify alternatives to Chester's Selectman-Town Meeting form of government to improve the Town's ability to plan and manage the Town's affairs. The Governance Study Committee completed its work, presenting a report in February of 2023, finding that Chester shares many of the same municipal challenges as other Connecticut municipalities, including:

- the increasing complexity of Town government
- challenges with continuity of executive leadership
- difficulty with recruiting and maintaining a professional staff
- difficulty in finding volunteers to serve and fill vacancies on boards and commissions

Chester Charter Commission

To address these issues, the Board of Selectmen established a Charter Commission charged with considering an alternative structure of government to lead and manage the Town. The Commission has up to 16 months to accomplish its work to:

- review the report of the Governance Study Committee and the Board of Selectmen actions to date;
- understand the governance options to address the issues;
- understand the Connecticut General Statutes that address the Governance Options available through a Charter;
- develop the governance structure that best addresses Chester's specific requirements;
- and complete a draft charter for consideration by the Board of Selectmen and the Town.

Following the unanimous approval of the recommendations of the Charter Commission Nominating Committee, seven members were seated to serve on the Commission – Mark Borton, Brian Dailey, Lol Fearon, Jesse Gnazzo, Pat Holloway, Ian McLachlan, and Richard Strauss, Commission Chair – and the first meeting was held on May 31, 2023. During this meeting, Town Attorney Richard Roberts, Halloran & Sage, provided an overview of the Charter adoption process, a timeline was presented to complete the draft Charter for a vote to be held at the regular municipal election of November 2024.

On June 6th, the Charter Commission held a regular meeting, elected Brian Dailey as the Commission secretary, reviewed the Chester Governance Study Committee report, and discussed available resources including consultation with professional management of other Connecticut towns including Columbia, Clinton, Portland, and Wilton at upcoming meetings.

Prior to any substantive work by the Charter Commission, an Initial Public Hearing is required, and is scheduled for June 21, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall (meeting room), and via TEAMS. The purpose of this hearing is to receive public comments. A regular meeting of the Charter Commission will follow the Public Hearing.

Public Input

All Commission meetings are open and include time for public comment. Input is also welcome via email sent to chesterchartercommission@gmail.com.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule

All meetings will be held in person at the Town Hall meeting room (unless otherwise noted), have remote access, and will be recorded. Agendas and TEAMS links are available on the town website at <https://chesterct.org>.

- June 20, 2023: Meeting with Chairs of Chester Boards and Commissions
- June 21, 2023: Public Hearing, 7:00 p.m.
- June 26, 2023: Speaker: Mark Walter, Town Administrator, Columbia. 6:30 p.m.
- June 27, 2023: Speaker: Matt Knickerbocker, Town Administrator, Wilton, 6:30 p.m.
- June 29, 2023: Speaker: Karl Kilduff, Town Manager, Clinton, 6:30 p.m.
- July 6, 2023: Speaker: Matt Hart, Executive Director, Capitol Region Council of Governments, 6:30 p.m.
- July 25, 2023: Speakers: Susan Bransfield (former First Selectman) and Ryan Curly (current First Selectman), Portland, 6:30 p.m.

The Commission looks forward to your participation and input into this very important work.

Respectfully,

Richard Strauss, Chair
Chester Charter Commission
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