



City of Methuen, Massachusetts

OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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Methuen, Massachusetts 01844

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CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday, April 10, 2025

6:45 PM

MEETING LOCATION: Great Hall
Methuen City Hall
41 Pleasant Street, 3rd Floor
Methuen, MA 01844

Notice of Public Hearing

1. Call to order – 6:45 PM
2. Roll call – All Members Present – Chair Steve Saba, Jennifer Kannan, Eleni Varitimos, John Cummings, Ian Gosselin, Dennis DiZoglio and Sharon Pollard
3. Acceptance of agenda - Motion to accept by Eleni Varitimos, seconded by Jennifer Kannan - Unanimous
4. Hear from residents regarding the Committee's work on revisions to the City Charter

Ralph Prolman – 69 Pinehurst Avenue - I'm talking about one issue first which I've only said this to the last two charter commissions. In Methuen we have a problem getting people to run for office. Won't go into why they have a problem but I'm all in favor of making it as easy as possible. One of the things I see in what was online with the charter is one thing that gets me. When we go and vote, it doesn't make any difference where we live the vote counts for the person we're voting for. Why in God's name does somebody have to go out and get 50 signatures in three different areas of town when it makes absolutely no difference when you're voting for somebody? We don't elect an at-large person by how many votes they got in this section, that section or another section. I'd like to see that provision eliminated and make it easier for people to get on the ballot. If you want a hundred fifty signatures, go out and get a hundred fifty signatures. Don't have to ask them where they live in what precinct they're in because most of the world in Methuen has absolutely no idea what precinct they live in. So that's my one thing that I've brought up in the past. I see that they did you know keep the number of signatures down where they have been. I've fought for that before. If you can make it a hundred rather than 150 that's all the better. Maybe it'll get somebody to run for council or maybe a third or fourth person to run for mayor because as we all know you walk in, and it's voting for one of the following one half the time or two of the following two. It would be nice occasionally to have a primary just to see that there's some interest. The second thing I'd like to say something about --- I see on the term limit list you have the two elected trustees for the Nevins library. For anyone who doesn't know I am the chairman of the board of the Nevins library. I have been on the Nevins library board since 1992. I have a lifetime appointment so unless somebody wants to shoot me, I can stay there as long as I want. I would like to see the elected people from the Nevins be taken off of term limits for the simple reason that it's hard to get anyone to run. If we get somebody on the board and they spend six years on the board and they want to stay and we have to say bye-bye to them we may have to go out and chase another person. The only good thing about this at my age is it may become a moot point

because by the time this passes, I'll be so stinking old I don't know if I'll care. But now I would love to see that withdrawn just so we can keep finding someone who's willing to run for a job that doesn't pay anything, that takes up some time and people often wonder why in God's name you waste your time doing it because they don't know we exist. Most people in this city have absolutely no idea that the Nevins library is run by a board of trustees who are appointed people from the original trust that dates back to 1883. So, we've been operating on one basis now for only 140 plus years. I hate to see it change just because a group of politicians decided it's time to make it harder. As I said I'm all in favor of making it easier for people to run and for people to get on a ballot. So, I would appreciate if you give some thought to the fact that I have a one-horse mind about this and would like to see it stay as is.

East District Councilor Neily Soto – 71 Comet Road - Good evening. Thank you, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the Charter Review Committee. Here this evening I sent in my statement to Mr. Chair prior to attending this evening so you could have that in writing for the record as well. I am a Methuen City Councilor and this evening my subject is clarification on the ambiguous language regarding the prevailing side in the Methuen City Charter. I rise today to address a long-standing concern regarding the ambiguous language in the Methuen City Charter related to the term "prevailing side" and its implications for procedural governance. In 2024 Councilor Valley and I, Councilor Soto, voted no on the purchase of the Searles Estate. Despite not being on the prevailing side of that vote, we later witnessed a troubling procedural maneuver wherein the non-prevailing side, those who voted yes, claimed the authority to bring the matter back to the floor. This maneuver was ultimately supported by the then solicitor who interpreted the majority as having the right to revisit the vote. That interpretation was and remains incorrect. According to standard rules of order and democratic process it is the prevailing side, those whose votes determine the outcome, who hold the authority to bring a matter back for reconsideration. When a vote fails the "no" votes prevail. When a vote passes the yes vote prevails. It is not a matter of how many people voted one way or another, but rather which side dictated the result. This misapplication of this principle undermines the integrity of our Council proceedings and creates room for manipulation of procedural rules to suit political convenience or personal agendas. This not only erodes public trust but also sets a dangerous precedent for future governance. Therefore, I respectfully urge this body to seek a legal opinion from either the Collins Center or an independent municipal law expert. More importantly, I recommend a charter clarification or amendment to clearly define the term prevailing side in alignment with standard parliamentary practice including Robert's Rules of Order. Furthermore, I urge that any changes to the charter also ensure that our City Council rules and regulations, Methuen City Charter and Robert's Rules of Order are consistent and unambiguous when it comes to defining and applying the authority of the prevailing side. Alignment across these governing documents is essential to ensure transparency, consistency, accountability, and how we govern in Methuen. Respectfully, I submit it again this in writing to you, Mr. Chair, and I want to commend you all for doing hard work for the City of Methuen and your dedication. I watch your meetings religiously, so I commend you. Thank you so much.

5. Adjourn – Motion to adjourn at 7:55 PM by Jennifer Kannan, seconded by John Cummings – unanimous.