

Robert J. Ring
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Thorndike MA 01079
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Town of Palmer
Charter Review Commission
Town Administration Building
Palmer MA 01069

Dear Chairman Burns,

I am writing to offer the Charter Review Commission some thoughts on what should be considered in amending the Town's current Charter. Prior commitments have, so far, made it difficult to attend one of your meetings, but I expect to be present at some future meeting to expand on these ideas.

The original Charter Commission included language requiring specific qualifications for some Town positions. This was an understandable effort to ensure a particular standard in these positions but I believe the result has been to shut out candidates who could more than adequately serve the needs of a town our size. For example, Palmer does not have the amount of road projects or similar activity that requires a full time Civil Engineer as a Director of Public Works. I believe the Town would find it difficult to attract individuals with the required degree at a salary the Town could afford. Even if an engineer were hired, the Town would still have to contract out for surveyors or hire more staff, not to mention the cost of keeping up with computer software and other equipment an Engineer would require. I believe that allowing future Managers and Councils to determine what is needed in a position is the preferred language for a Charter.

I believe the increasing complexity of laws, regulations, and court decisions, both State and Federal require a full time, well qualified executive to oversee the day to day operations of Palmer. The arguments for a return to select-board/ open meeting form of government I find unconvincing. It is not reasonable to expect part-time, poorly compensated volunteers with uncertain qualifications to stay on top of the changes forced on communities by upper levels of government. If people want to protest these requirements I would be glad to join that protest. But adopting a form of government which would place Palmer at a disadvantage in grant applications, or competing with other communities for opportunities or possibly facing sanctions because of some overlooked regulation is not a solution to unfunded mandates.

I offer an example where a lack of oversight has resulted in unexpected costs to the Town. The old State Street landfill needs major maintenance which is expected to cost the Town several hundreds of thousands of dollars. The reason is that at some point, under the old form of government, the required mowing was stopped and as a result the underbrush grew up and destroyed the upper liner with the result of allowing water to leech through the landfill and affect a nearby stream. I point out this example with no

intent of accusing any individual of anything. Indeed, with a budget subject to open meetings, it impossible to blame any one person when maintenance is stopped. This is simply a situation where a more focused executive might have seen the need to keep the required mowing in the budget.

I am not opposed to some alteration in the new form of government. I have spoken to people whose towns have a representative form of open meeting, with a manager, and they seem satisfied with the situation.

I appreciate the Charter Review Commission is in the early stages of a lengthy process and that at some point you will be discussing these, and other points, in more detail. As I mentioned I plan to be part of that discussion. In the meantime I hope this letter gives the Commission some points to consider as you draft a schedule.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Ring