

To: Palmer Charter Commission
From: Michael Ryan
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Dear Committee Members:

Your collective task is indeed of great importance to the future of the town of Palmer. In my opinion you were seated to review all types of government structures and that the choice isn't solely between a return to Selectman / Town Meeting or to continue with the current Town Manager/Council format as some vocal residents repeatedly insist.

I am hopeful that you will indeed consider other options than those two and that the final recommendation presented to the electorate is a consensus effort that will help to grow this town. If this effort concludes with a return to the past, I will vote no on that question when it is presented. If the effort concludes with no change to the present format, I also will vote no on that. Neither of these two alternatives is growing the town and /or providing for effective leadership.

In my opinion, there are criteria in the current charter that can or will never be realized, primarily due to funding, and those issues need to be addressed for revision. Specifically, we have failed to deliver the degreed individuals needed to fill the mandated positions of Finance Director and DPW Director. During the last search for a Town Manager, the council actually considered filling that position with an individual that lacked the qualifications set forth in the charter. As of yet, we still have yet to fund and hire a recreation director also set forth in the charter.

The current charter defined the qualifications expected of these positions and clearly they have not been reached, regardless of the reasons. Minimally, we need to modify the charter to reassess and properly define the qualifications of the positions if we will not effectively require those qualifications to be incumbent of the individuals who fulfill those positions. If this is not addressed, we may continue to struggle with hiring and in developing succession plans in some of our departments. If we do feel that these stronger qualifications are needed, then we need to move toward that goal. When all is said and done, the qualifications need to be on pace with our ability to appropriately attract candidates and fund the roles we say are needed. If we are going to continue to short change the value of these positions, we will continue to short change the value of our town.

I would also like to suggest, if a modified version of the current type of

government is the outcome of your efforts, that a reduction of councilors from 9 to 7 is considered and that the selection of the councilors are all at-large. In the current format, I am only allowed to vote on 2/3 of the council. I would like to be able to directly influence and/or support councilors with my vote and the current set-up does not allow for that. This change would also minimize the potential for seats to be won due to a lack of opposition. The voters should have an equal opportunity to seat all of the councilors, not limited to 2/3 of them.

I would also favor a requirement that the president of the council be determined as the councilor who garners the largest vote count of the at-large election. In that way, the electorate has truly chosen its leadership. It is my opinion that fewer councilors and their individual ability to garner town wide support will provide a stronger quality of candidates vying for the council. Selecting our leadership should be our total responsibility and it should not be proportioned by district, or left to a council vote.

Finally, I am not in favor of conducting telephone surveys or any other media inducements to determine what the people want. Either of those methods can unfortunately be manipulated by special interest groups to show a support that may not be accurately reflecting what an individual is truly willing to support. A poll question that was recently suggested was improperly worded and a poll based on it would be detrimental to determining a solid direction. A mail-in poll also could result in ballot stuffing and other practices that could cloud the opinion of the electorate. The people clearly voted for a commission to discuss, debate, deliberate and deliver a consensus charter document that when completed, is to be voted on by the people.

Communications, such as this e-mail, should be encouraged by the commission as a method of outlining people's thoughts on what they would like, or support and used in fashioning that charter. Attendance at the meetings isn't as important as communicating thoughts and ideas in whatever format they come in and having them considered by the committee. One person or group continuing to say the same message over and over again at every public meeting and in opinion columns in the print media is not effectively communicating the intent of the electorate and does not give their opinion any additional credence. It is in fact impeding the electorate from attending the sessions. This impediment is already surfacing simply by having to consider limiting public comment as was recently reported.

I thank you for reading this communication and for your consideration of my views as you deliberate the next charter for the town of Palmer and hope that you can construct a document that is worthy of my favorable vote.

Regards,

Michael Ryan