



Matthew Streeter
Town Manager

Town of Palmer

"Bondsville, Depot Village, Thorndike & Three Rivers"

Palmer Town Building
4417 Main Street
Palmer, MA 01069
Town: (413) 283-2603
Fax: (413) 283-2604
townmgr@townofpalmer.com

April 6, 2009

Charter Review Commission
Palmer Town Building
4417 Main Street
Palmer, MA 01069

Dear Members of the Charter Review Commission,

Thank you for your invitation to address your meeting of Tuesday, April 7th, 2009. It is unfortunate that I cannot attend that evening, but I submit this letter in my absence, as I feel there are several areas of the charter that your committee should review in your deliberations to bring forth the best document possible to the citizens of Palmer.

The setting of salaries by the officers appointed by the town council by ordinance. In Section 2-8(b) and Section 3-1(c), the charter stipulates that the ordinance process be used to set salaries of appointed officers, which is specified in Sec. 2-8(a) as the recording secretary of the council, one member of the library board of trustees and the town manager. Sec. 3-1(c) is redundant with respect to the town manager. My thoughts on these are that there is no evidence that this has been utilized prior to my arrival as town manager. I actually informed the council that my salary needed to be set by charter during the hiring process. The ordinance process adds another layer of time and expense. I believe that the council should have the authority to set these salaries by simple resolution.

Council Review of certain appointments. In Section 2-10(a), one portion of this section pertains to the council review of 4 "certain" appointees: heads of the Departments of Municipal Services, Public Works, Municipal Finance and Public Safety, and as described in Section 6 of the Charter. Hiring by the town manager should be free and unfettered from the council. If the manager goes through a process to name these "super-department heads," there should not be an opportunity for the council to exert supremacy in this matter. This interference with administration is prohibited in Section 2-3(b) or the charter. It is perhaps for this reason that these positions have yet to be filled and budgeted for. I have no other concerns with regards to Sec. 2-10(a) and the councils review over appointments to multiple-member boards or agents.

Administrative Organization. Section 6 deals with the aforementioned "super-department heads." Requirements on levels of education for these positions should be eliminated. There are some instances when education is not the most important factor when determining the right balance of knowledge, experience and leadership for a position. But when deliberating on a municipal charter, it is prudent to leave room for this subjective determination as opposed to etching stringent requirements in stone.

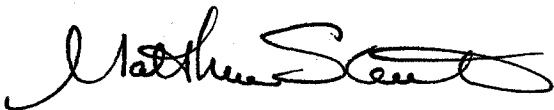
Conservation Lands. The Palmer Conservation Commission has raised an issue with regards to the care, custody and control of lands under their control. I endorse any measure or language which ensures continued control of the lands by the Palmer Conservation Commission and/or their successor agency should the charter be modified to change or eliminate the PCC.

Annual Report of the Town. Section 9-8 deals with the Annual Report. I would recommend that the final sentence with regards to making the report available be modified. The Annual Report could be made available in the Town Clerk and Town Manager offices, as well as on the town website. I would remove having the report available at the polls during the November election.

Elected Officials. This may be an unpopular move, but there is some validity to having both an appointed planning board and an appointed town clerk (Sections 4-3 & 4-4). Excluding personalities in the current positions, the charter commission should look to the future of this community. It is important for these positions to do their jobs not only in an unbiased and transparent nature, but also in a manner conforming to the statutes of the commonwealth. These offices that follow the laws and codes protect the interests of the town. These individuals ought to not have to face the repercussions of their decisions at the ballot box should the correct decision be an unpopular one.

Ordinance Review. Section 9-5(a) of the Charter calls for a periodic review of all town ordinances by a special committee every five years. Since it is to be "without substantive change," I am unsure as to why the legislative branch (the council) should need a special committee. Added to the financial cost of recodification, it may be judicious to coincide this review with the charter review every ten years.

Thank you for your consideration. I think that all in all, some "tweaking" of the charter is necessary, regardless of the type of governance structure the committee resolves upon. Please let me know if you would need further elaboration on my thoughts or on any other aspect of municipal governance with respect to Palmer.



Matthew Streeter
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