

SAUGUS CHARTER COMMISSION
APPROVED MEETING MINUTES
OF
SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

The thirty-fourth meeting of the Saugus Charter Commission was held on Thursday, September 11, 2008. The meeting was held in the auditorium, at the Saugus Town Hall. The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Peter Manoogian, at 7:00 P.M.

Completion of STEP 4: SELECT THE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION(S)

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Eight members of the nine member committee were present at roll call: Karen Cote, Eugene Decareau, Karla J. de Steuben, Albert W. Diotte, Jr., Joan Fowler, Peter Manoogian, Sr., Debra Panetta and Thomas Stewart

Cam Cicolini had informed the Chairman that she would be late. The Chairman also noted that the Consultant, Mr. Curran, would not be present, but will be at the next Meeting.

READING OF MINUTES OF LAST MEETING (August 28, 2008)

Minutes were distributed to all Commission Members for review before the next meeting.

ACCEPTANCE OF PREVIOUS MINUTES (August 21, 2008)

Ms. de Steuben noted corrections to the Minutes.

Ms. de Steuben made a motion to accept the Minutes of August 21, 2008, as amended.

The Chairman seconded the motion.

The motion passed **8-0**

PUBLIC COMMENT

None at this time.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer, Mr. Decareau, made a correction to his last report, stating that the accurate balance in the account is \$28,968.37, not \$28,868.37. He also noted that this is in agreement with the Accounting Department.

Mr. Stewart moved to accept the corrected Treasurer's Report.

The Chairman seconded the motion.

The motion passed **8-0**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman passed around an invitation that he received in the Charter Commission mailbox, inviting the Members to the dedication of the Chris Ciampa, Jr. Youth and Recreation Center. The dedication will take place on September 27, 2008.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Manoogian informed the Commission Members that he had received a letter from consultant applicant Petrini & Associates, requesting copies of the other bids.

Eugene Decareau made a motion to accept the correspondence and refer it to the Town Manager, keeper of records, for appropriate action.

The Chairman seconded the motion.

The motion passed **8-0**

The letter was given to the Clerk bring to the Town Manager's Office.

The Chairman noted that the Members had received two items in their packets: Information from Mr. Curran, with four major questions regarding the size and nature of the legislature, and data from the Clerk showing how many of the last five Town Meeting Elections have been uncontested. The Clerk's statistics showed that 32% of the elections had 5 or less candidates. Of those 16 races, 13 had just 5 candidates, and 3 had less than 5 candidates. The Chairman referred to the part of Mr. Curran's question #2, "Are there precincts which at some elections do not have as many candidates for office (on the ballot) as there are 'seats' to fill?" Mr. Manoogian noted that obviously the answer is, "yes."

NEW BUSINESS (order to be determined by members)

Mr. Manoogian asked for suggestions from the Commission Members as to how they would like to proceed with New Business, going over the Members' proposal ratings, or discuss the size of the Legislature.

- **Discussion – Decision??? Size of Legislature**

Ms. Cote said that she would like the Members to discuss and agree on the size of the Legislature, devoting one or two meetings to the discussion, so that the members could come to an agreement and move on.

Debra Panetta agreed, stating that the size of the Legislature is probably one of the most important things they have to decide on as a Commission.

Ms. de Steuben asked for clarification, stating that some of the proposals combine part of what is now the Executive branch with the Legislature, and confirmed that the Members would be discussing the total body.

The Chairman stated that he feels it is important, even if they come to a consensus, that they needed a second meeting to provide the Commission Members with an opportunity to re-visit some of the issues before voting.

Mr. Manoogian asked the Members if they wanted to use Mr. Curran's discussion questions as a prompt, noting that the Commission has discussed many of these things, such as ethics, the ways in which representatives determine the views of their constituents, size of Legislature, combining districts, etc.

Ms. Panetta referred to the part of question #1, "Does the present number 'work' in terms of attracting a sufficient number of candidates for every available 'seat' to create a true electoral choice?" Referring to the Clerk's statistics, she noted that 62% of the elections had six candidates or less, and feels that the Commission needs to do something to attract more candidates.

Mr. Manoogian noted that some of the Commission's criteria were enhanced and increased representation, competitive and meaningful elections. Both the Commission and Mr. Curran have discussed ethics, as well. Mr. Manoogian brought up the question that, if the Commission "ratchets" up the ethics considerations, would they still attract the same amount of candidates to the same model that they have.

For purpose of discussion, Mr. Decareau suggested, without changing the number of precincts, electing 3 from each precinct, with 5 elected at large, for a total of 35.

Ms. de Steuben responded to that, suggesting a discussion as to how that relates to Mr. Curran's part of question #1, "Does the present number of members (assuming the 35 currently being discussed) 'work' in terms of creating a body capable of having meaningful discussion / debate and for the dissemination and exchange of information and data to assist members in reaching decisions on the issues which come before the body?" Ms. de Steuben raised the question that with 35 members, which still seems pretty large, would it allow for a discussion among all 35 members? She assumed that, having representatives from each precinct, voters would want to know where their Representatives stood on each issue before they take the vote. With larger numbers, you lose the ability of that Legislative body to have meaningful discussions because of time constraints.

The Chairman asked Ms. de Steuben if there was a lesser number that she would like to suggest. Ms. de Steuben stated that she had suggested 13, but has thought about 15, keeping 1 member from each precinct, because then each precinct would still be represented, and then 5 at large, which would be a hold-over from what the Board of Selectmen are now, combining the two as a Legislative body. Ms. de Steuben referred to Newton's form of government, where they have 24 members, and were able to have meaningful discussions, mostly in sub-committees. She also referred to guest Jay Ash of Chelsea as telling the Commission, that with 11 or 13 members, he was having trouble making sure that each of the understood the details of the budget, and that he would have preferred 9 because it would be easier to bring each member up to speed on the proposed budget. Ms. de Steuben also referred to a book called "The Model City Charter," put out by the National Civic League, which recommends keeping the size small for the purpose of meaningful discussion.

Ms. de Steuben stated that she would probably be satisfied with 15, because you could make a good argument that it's reflective of the kind of government that we have right now, but still thinks that might be too large.

Peter Manoogian expressed his opinion that, along with the advantages of a small body, there are also consequences. A concern that he has with, for example, 15 members, is that the majority would be 8, allowing for the recruitment of candidates by factions, and he feels that Saugus is a faction-driven community. He also stated that candidates for a small legislature that would be responsible for re-zoning would have to raise money for their election and re-election and could be influenced by campaign donations of the very individuals who would come before them to seek zoning changes. He also mentioned that if the donations were not direct they could be in the form of "ticket sales" to a fundraiser and the

candidate would then give away the tickets, a common election practice used to shield the names of the donors. He stated that one of the advantages of larger numbers is the idea of mitigating factions, and the ability to minimize the effect of factions. He stated that he doesn't believe the Town has a problem with factions controlling now, and feels that there is a balance. He also stated that, although there are limitations of debate and opportunity as town meeting is structured, he would rather work on the limitations and retain the benefits of size if there is a way to get an in-between point.

Mr. Diotte expressed his favor of 50 members, but if the number per precinct was reduced to 4 with 10 at large and staggered elections, more candidates might come forward to run for the open positions.

Mr. Decareau gave his reason for preferring a large number, stating he felt it gave the people in each precinct a better opportunity for communication and accessibility of representatives.

Mr. Stewart stated his preference for a smaller Legislature, having suggested 13 in his proposal. He went on to say that he is not comfortable with a 50 member body, and suggested splitting the difference and going into the 20's.

After continued discussion, the Chairman asked Ms. Fowler for her thoughts. She stated that she liked the 25-27 number, because she thinks a smaller group can do more than the larger group.

Debra Panetta asked Cam Cicolini about her thoughts on the 25-27 number, referring to Ms. Cicolini's proposal of 70 members. (She noted that at the last meeting, Ms. Cicolini had stated that she would go down to 50.)

Cam Cicolini responded that if it was the consensus of the board, she would go along with it. She expressed her concern, that for the public's sake, the Commission keeps working together as a unit, and whatever they decide to do, portray that to the residents of Saugus. She stated that it is important for the Commission to stay in unity.

Ms. de Steuben asked the Chairman if Mr. Curran would be at the next meeting, to which Mr. Manoogian replied that it was his understanding that Mr. Curran would be attending the next meeting. Mr. Manoogian also notified the Members that the Town Hall Auditorium would not be available next Thursday, September 18, and would discuss a location at the end of the meeting.

Karla suggested that it might be helpful to get some feedback from Mr. Curran on the size of the Legislature before trying to reach a decision. Mr. Manoogian agreed that the Commission should not reach a decision yet, but would like to know if they are on the cusp of a consensus yet. He would like to have something to present to Mr. Curran.

Ms. Cote stated that the Commission had made progress, and maybe should end the debate here, bring it to Mr. Curran next week, and hear what he has to say.

The Chairman summarized that the Commission had reached a consensus in the range of 25-35, acknowledging that it was not unanimous decision.

Mr. Manoogian stated that the goal of the evening was to try to narrow things down, noting that there had been some good discussion. He feels the Commission Members know what each other's concerns and passions are. He said that he was happy with the

amount of open-mindedness and compromise that had been expressed by all of the Members.

NEXT MEETING DATE – Thursday, September 18, 2008

Members agreed that the next meeting will take place on Thursday, September 18, 2008, at 7:30 P.M. The Clerk will arrange a location.

MEMBERS ANNOUNCEMENTS / MOTIONS

Ms. Cote suggested that the Clerk be provided with a copy of any hand-outs that are provided to Charter Member.

PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Steven Mark Couture of Plymouth, MA, and a property owner in the Town of Saugus, expressed his interest in politics, government, law, and civil rights. He thanked the Commission for making him feel comfortable attending the meetings, as an interested citizen.

ADJOURNMENT

Karen Cote moved to adjourn at 9:08 P.M.

The Chairman seconded the motion

The motion passed **9-0**

APPROVED ON _____

SUBMITTED BY _____