



# City of Methuen, Massachusetts

## OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

The Searles Building • 41 Pleasant Street

Methuen, Massachusetts 01844

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### CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, June 11, 2025

7:00 PM

**MEETING LOCATION:**      **Great Hall**  
                                         **Methuen City Hall**  
                                         **41 Pleasant Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**  
                                         **Methuen, MA 01844**

### MEETING AGENDA

1. **Call to order at 7:00 PM**
2. **Roll call - Members present – Steve Saba, John Cummings, Jennifer Kannan, Dennis DiZoglio and Sharon Pollard - City Solicitor Paul O'Neill is present – absent members – Eleni Varitimos & Ian Gosselin**
3. **Acceptance of agenda – Motion to accept by Jennifer Kannan, seconded by John Cummings – unanimous vote.**
4. **Approve minutes of previous meeting May 15, 2025 Public Hearing and Regular meeting – Minutes not ready yet.**
5. **Public Participation - NONE**
6. **Review additional comments and answers provided by the Collins Center – – Motion to table by Sharon Pollard, seconded by Jennifer Kannan – unanimous vote.**
7. **Begin the second round of edits Articles 1,2,3 and 4 (time permitting.) – Chair Saba said, “So, now we can start on the second reading of the Charter, starting with Article 1.” Sharon Pollard said, “When we're dealing with this Charter, I don't know if anybody else feels the same way or not, it's pretty verbose. There's a lot of language in it that I think is, some of which is not necessary and difficult for people to understand. Clearly, we want this to be a document that people can read and understand. So, I passed out, and tell me if this is not an appropriate time to discuss this, but I went through, I took a small one because it was laborious, but I took a section of the Charter, as we're dealing with it, and redid the language, and I think it simplified it, and I think the whole document needs that kind of a review. Eleni and I were talking about it, and she said in her office, some people that she's spoken to have taken documents and converted ChatAI document. I'm not an AI person; I'm not skilled or knowledgeable about that, but they take their documents, and they use the ChatAI vehicle, to put their documents in, to make them more succinct, tighten up the language, make it very readable and understandable. And I'm wondering if that's an exercise we'd like to undertake.” Jennifer Kannan said, “I think in the end, if it's possible, once we do the changes that we want to change, the Clerk's office, may be able to scan the document, put it in ChatAI, and then print it. It's going to make it easier to read, but then again, we want to just make sure that what we said. But it takes out all the superfluous language and makes it more understandable and readable.” Steve Saba said, “So I think that's what we're supposed to be doing, so that's fine, and I don't have a problem with this. I would rather do it as we go along. We can do some tonight. This is probably a good time for me to summarize our process. As I promised at the last meeting, I**

met with Paul and the Mayor and the Chair of the Council a couple of days after our 5-15-2025 meeting. We discussed the timeline that it's going to take to get this done, and what I told them at that meeting was that we will try to have this presented to the Council by the beginning of September. Okay, if not, then you're putting it off to the next Council, and it delays everything. Well, the Council meets, goes over the changes, then approves it and then gets it into Boston. I spoke with State Rep. Hamilton, and he said he could help push it through so that this Council that will be leaving office in December would be able to vote on this. The only way is to have it to them by early September. So, all I'm saying is that we will probably want to have a few more meetings and go through this this summer. So, I would recommend that we go through this, and if you want to put some of these chapters in ChatAI and see how it works. I could do that." Jennifer Kannan said, "I think once we're done, --- because we make the changes, they don't make the changes --- and then they will condense the language." Solicitor O'Neill said, "I will tell you that the results sometimes are good and sometimes are not so good. So, we'll look at it and then clean it up, and certainly it can make helpful suggestions. And a lot of this language is left over and a little archaic." Steve Saba said, "Yes, we can try to get that done. We can start going through this now, and then in the meantime, maybe we can ask IT, if someone can do that, put it through ChatAI, and then give it back with suggested changes. We could, but then we have to go through it again, because as Paul said, I've dealt with that ChatAI, and you have to go through word for word to make sure it does what we think it's doing. We can consider doing that." Jennifer Kannan said, "You know what we could do, say we do four chapters now, we can put those forth to the ChatAI tool." Steve Saba said, "Yes, that's what I'm saying. Let's just do that and not wait, because we want to try to be done by September. If we go through two chapters here or whatever we do, we'll have them work on it."

Steve Saba said, "And while we're talking about that, in the very beginning of the Charter is a summary of the Charters in the city of Methuen. We haven't really done much with this. So, we'll probably have to come back to that very first page and figure out what we're going to do with that." Jennifer Kannan said, "I think also what we could add to that is the CAFO Act - Chapter 278, because that was a law that changed, and we should add that to this list." Jennifer Kannan agreed to work with the Council Clerks on updating this list after 1993. Solicitor O'Neill said, "I think you talked before about whether this should stay up front or move entirely to Appendix I and just have it begin with the articles, but that's solely at your discretion. But I do think we should keep that history somewhere in it, even as an appendix, because it's very helpful to us legal folks when we have a question to go back to." Steve Saba said, "The chronology of charter amendments. And I'm not sure everything's in there, but if you want to work on the two of those things, that would be really helpful."

## **Review of the Charter dated March 28, 2025**

Article I, Section 1.1. – no changes

Article I, Section 1.2 – no changes

Article I, Section 1.3 - no changes

Article I, Section 1.4 - no changes

Article I, Section 1.5 - no changes

Article I, Section 1.6 - no changes

**Dennis DiZoglio made a motion to approve Article I, as previously amended, seconded by Jennifer Kannan. Unanimously approved.**

## **ARTICLE 2 – Legislative Branch**

Section 2.1 Composition; Eligibility; Election and Term

**Section 2.1 (a) - The CRC discussed the changes in Section 2.1. which increased the number of precincts from 12 to 15. Also, Sharon Pollard made a motion seconded by Jennifer Kannan - when there's a historical reference in parentheses, to move that notation to the end of the Charter in the Chronology of Charter Amendments section. – Unanimously approved.**

**Section 2.1 (b) – no changes**

**Section 2.1 (c) – Motion by Jennifer Kannan, seconded by John Cummings to when there's a historical reference in parentheses, to move that notation to the end of the Charter in the Chronology of Charter Amendments section. – Unanimously approved.**

The CRC had a discussion regarding the language – “No person shall hold office of City Councilor for more than three (3) consecutive terms.” The CRC discussed when a City Councilor is brought in due to an opening happening in the middle of the term, as “Acting City Councilor” who is filling the unexpired term of someone who has vacated the position. Solicitor O'Neill stated that his predecessor issued an opinion that said the acting term didn't count toward the three (3) consecutive term limit. They might want to put in clarifying language if that's what the CRC wants to say explicitly. He recommended language, “No person shall hold office of City Councilor for more than three **elected** consecutive terms.” Because, that person is not being elected by the people. The appointment is made by the City Council. The CRC asked Solicitor O'Neill to render in writing, options to address this issue and to also check with the Collins Center on this issue. **Motion to TABLE Section 2-1(c) “election” and “term” by Jennifer Kannan, seconded by John Cummings – Unanimously approved.**

**Section 2.2 - Organization**

**Motion by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Sharon Pollard to amend the first sentence - “After the Councilors elect have been sworn, the City Council shall be called together by the member with the total lifetime seniority serving on the Methuen City Council. *If there are two (2) members with equal seniority*, then the oldest member shall preside.” – Unanimously approved.**

**Sharon Pollard made a motion, seconded by Jennifer Kannan, to amend the terms Chairman and Vice Chairman to President and Vice President. – Unanimously approved.**

**Section 2.3 – Compensation; Expenses – no changes**

**Section 2-4 – General Powers and Duties – no changes**

**Section 2-5 – Prohibitions – Dennis DiZoglio made a motion, seconded by Jennifer Kannan to add School Department employment to this section. – Unanimously approved.**

No former Councilor shall hold any compensated appointive City **or School** office or City or **School Department** employment until 2 years after the expiration of such councilor's service on the City Council. This provision shall not prevent a City ~~officer~~ or **School** employee who has taken a leave of absence from such duties in order to serve as a member of the City Council from returning to the same office or position of city employment held at the time of said councilor's assumption of office following service as a member of the City Council.

**Section 2.6 – Filling of Vacancies – Motion to accept, Section 2.6 as amended by replacing language of Section 2.6 as presented by Sharon Pollard and seconded by Jennifer Kannan – Unanimously approved.**

Section 2.6 - Once the City Clerk **has declared** knowledge of a vacancy **in writing**, the City Clerk shall immediately inform the Mayor, City Council and City Solicitor ~~if a the vacancy occurs in the office of Councilor at Large or in the office of District Councilor, whether by failure to elect or otherwise.~~ The City Council shall, within twenty-one days following the date such vacancy is declared to exist, act to fill the said

vacancy. The Council shall elect, as ~~acting Councilor~~ ~~whichever of the defeated candidate who was next in line for the seat in which the vacancy is declared to exist, that person who was next in line and was certified and received at 20% of the lowest vote getter's ballots at the last regular City election immediately preceding the date the vacancy is declared to exist, east for the office at such election, and who remains~~ **providing that the candidate remains** eligible and willing to serve.

If there ~~being is~~ no such person, the Council Chair shall ~~make~~ announce that an application for ~~candidacy~~ **will be** available in the City Clerk's office and ~~post said application~~ on the City of Methuen's website. Within twenty-one (21) days, the City Council Chair shall announce and schedule a public hearing to hear from the applicants who wish to fill the vacancy. **After the public hearing,** ~~Then~~ the City Council **will choose the person from** ~~vote amongst the applicants, to be an acting~~ **serve as** Councilor ~~to serve for the balance remainder~~ of the unexpired term. If the City Council is unable to make a ~~such choice is not made as~~ ~~hereinbefore provided~~ within the said twenty-one days, the candidate ~~choice~~ shall be chosen ~~made~~ by the Councilor senior, **both** in length of service **and age.** ~~or if there be more than one such, by the Councilor senior both in age and in terms of service. Any person so~~ The **applicant** chosen shall be sworn in and ~~commence~~ **begin** to serve immediately ~~forthwith~~. No vacancy shall be filled, ~~in the manner hereinbefore provided,~~ if a regular City election is to be held within one hundred twenty (120) days following the date the vacancy is declared to exist.

## **Section 2-7. Exercise of Powers; Quorum; Rules of Procedure. Motion to accept all amendments in Section 2.7 by Jennifer Kannan, seconded by Sharon Pollard – Unanimously approved.**

(a) Exercise of Powers - Except as otherwise prohibited by law or the Charter, the legislative powers of the City Council may be exercised in a manner determined by it.

(b) Quorum - ~~The presence of Five (5) members of the City Council shall constitute a quorum. The presence of 5 members of the City Council~~

(c) Appropriation Orders - The affirmative vote of a majority of the full City Council shall be necessary to adopt any appropriation order **and other measures.** Except as otherwise provided by law or the Charter, any other motion or measure may be adopted by a majority vote of those present.

(d) Rules of Procedure - The City Council shall, from time to time, establish rules for its proceedings. Regular meetings of the City Council shall be held at a time and place fixed by ordinance, but which shall be not less frequent than once monthly. Special meetings of the City Council may be held on the call of the **President** of the City Council, or on the call of any three or more members, by written notice delivered to the place of residence of each member or via electronic mail at least 48 hours in advance of the time set. All such notices shall be posted as required by law. Except as otherwise authorized by General Laws, all sessions of the City Council shall be open to the public and press. Every matter coming before the City Council for action shall be put to a vote, the result of which shall be duly recorded. A full, accurate, and up-to-date record of the proceedings of the City Council shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by the public.

## **Section 2-8 – Council Staff**

(a) Clerk of the Council - The City Council shall, on or before January fifteenth in odd numbered years, elect, by ballot or otherwise, a Clerk of the Council to hold office for a term of two years, **if not, will vacate the position immediately.** **Jennifer Kannan made a motion, seconded by John Cummings, to amend – Unanimously approved.** The Clerk of the Council shall give notice of all meetings of the City Council to its members and to the public, keep a record of its proceedings and perform such duties as may be assigned by the Charter, by ordinance, or by other vote of the City Council. (Odd numbered year appointment by amendment approved by

the Legislature June 28th, 1996, as Chapter 145 of the Acts and Resolves of 1996. Amendment submitted by City Council Order #3738, approved February 5th, 1996.)

(b) Assistant Clerk of the Council – The City Council shall, on or before January fifteenth in odd numbered years, elect, by ballot or otherwise, an Assistant Clerk of the Council to hold office for a term of two years. The Assistant Clerk shall assist the Clerk of the Council in performing duties as prescribed by the Council Chair or as directed by a vote of the City Council. **In the event that the City Council Clerk is unable to discharge their duties, the Assistant Council Clerk will act as interim until a permanent Council Clerk is selected.** **Jennifer Kannan made a motion, seconded by Dennis DiZoglio to amend – Unanimously approved** (Chapter 252 of the Acts of November 1, 2022) (Amendment submitted by the City Council Order # 5697 approved January 19, 2022)

**The CRC had an extensive discussion on whether the City Solicitor should be a City Council appointment/employee or Mayoral appointment/employee. Dennis DiZoglio said, “There's going to be a diverse opinion based on our experience. Whenever we take a vote, if it's 4 to 3, whatever it is, that there is at least a paragraph or a sentence in the transmittal letter saying that there was a diverse opinion on whether the City Solicitor should be with the Council or with the Mayor, and on a split vote, it was decided to recommend whatever. And the Council can change it.” Solicitor O'Neill said the CRC could file a Majority and Minority opinion regarding this issue.**

**Section 2-9. Measures; Emergency Measures; Charter Objection. – No Changes**

**Section 2-10. Delegation of Powers. – No Changes**

**Section 2-11. Inquiries and Investigations. – No Changes**

**Section 2-12 School-Municipal Cooperation.**

The City Council, Mayor and the School Committee shall endeavor to keep each other apprised of important developments related to the budget, policies, upcoming issues and other important matters of the city and schools and shall seek to work together in the best interests of the residents of the city. Joint meetings of the two bodies shall be held at least ~~3~~ 2 times annually, to include the annual budget meeting as provided in section 6-2 of the charter, and such other meetings as the council and school committee shall jointly determine. **Motion to amend by striking the number 3 in the second sentence by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Jennifer Kannan – Unanimously approved.**

**Motion to accept Article 2 of the Charter as amended – 4 yes, 1 no (Sharon Pollard) 2 absent (Eleni Varitimos & Ian Gosselin)**

**8. Confirm the next meeting date and time – Wednesday, July 2, 2025 at 6:30 PM**

**9. Adjourn: 9:25 PM.**