

Bedford Charter Commission Report

DRAFT v4

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Charter Commission Members

Terry Wolf, Chair	Sue Labrie
Kelleigh Gleason, Vice Chair	Bryan Lord
Paul Brock, Secretary	Matthew McLaughlin
Linda Camarota	Lori Radke
Jeff Kerr	

Executive Summary

In 20xx, a citizen's petition was submitted to put the topic of voting on the town's budget as a warrant article. Warrant article appeared on the March 2023 ballot and was approved xxx to xx. Nine commissioners were elected: Paul Brock, Linda Camarota, Kelleigh Gleason, Jeff Kerr, Susan Labrie, Bryan Lord, Matthew McLaughlin, Lori Radke and Terry Wolf.

The commission met x times from April through September 2023. The town attorney provided an outline of the necessary outcomes, not only did the commission think it's a good idea to recommend official ballot voting but how – changes to the charter.

Add statutes, requirements – report due by, two public hearings

Add highlights of people.

Held a preliminary public hearing for feedback.

In June, the commissioners agreed to form two subcommittees. One would review the Bedford Town Charter and propose revisions and one commission would write the report as required by statute.

The commissioners worked during July and August to write, review and update drafts.

The charter commission voted to recommend/not recommend official ballot voting x-x.

The final public hearing was held xxxx.

Introduction

Since its incorporation in 1750, Bedford has governed itself by a form of government usually referred to as ‘town meeting.’ Viewed by some as the ultimate form of democracy, town meeting allows registered voters, gathered as a body, to discuss, vote, and make decisions about issues and finances affecting the town. When SAU25 (School Administrative Unit 25, responsible for the management of the Bedford schools) was established in xxxxxxxx, Bedford effectively had two governmental organizations, one for the schools and one for all other town matters. Both were managed via ‘town meeting’ form of voting in which voters would gather to discuss, amend, and vote on Articles proposed by either the Town Council or the School Board.

In 1995, the NH Legislature passed RSA 40:13 (often referred to as SB2 or Official Ballot Referenda) which allowed for a two-session town meeting. Session One (the deliberative session) allowed voters to gather, discuss, receive explanations, and possibly amend the Articles to be voted by official ballot at Session Two.

In 1996, Bedford voters considered whether Bedford should adopt SB2 for SAU25. Prior to this, most school town meetings were attended by less than 100 voters out of a voting population of yyyyyy. Arguments for the vote were mostly centered around achieving a broader voter involvement in school decisions. Arguments against were focused on the belief that town meeting attendees would be more well informed and thus able to make better decisions for the schools. The proposal passed and SAU25 has operated under SB2 since that time. As a result, financial and budgetary decisions are made by everyone who votes in the March election, not just by the small number that turn out for the school version of town meeting

In 2023, a petitioned article was presented which stated “Shall a Charter Commission be established for the sole purpose of establishing official ballot voting under the current form of government?” The article passed by a vote of 2304 to 891. This report, which follows, represents the results of the work of the aforementioned Charter Commission. It should be noted that this Charter Commission was not charged with deciding the merits of official ballot voting. Rather, the charge was to study the issue and bring forth a report that defined how best to implement official ballot voting in Bedford. This report is the product of the work done by the Commission.

The members of the Charter Commission, as elected by Bedford’s voters, are:

Terry Wolf – Chair
Paul Brock – Secretary
Matthew McLaughlin
Susan Labrie
Kelly Gleason – Vice Chair
Jeff Kerr
Bryan Lord
Lori Radke
Linda Camarota

Research

Overview of key pieces of research – keep it simple

- Bedford's Charter
- Basic types of government
- Bedford voting data
- Official ballot voting
- Default budgets
- X

Meetings – Overview

The Charter Commission held x meetings between April and September 2023.

April 19, 2023

The Charter Commission held its first meeting. Town Clerk Sally Kellar swore in members of the commission.

- Terry Wolf was elected chair, Kelleigh Gleason vice chair and Paul Brock secretary
- Commission members approved the bylaws as presented and reviewed the timeline
- Commission members discussed the process with the Town Attorney Michael Courtney from Upton & Hatfield

May 3, 2023

- Town Manager Rick Sawyer provided background on Bedford's charter and the various governmental structures of towns and cities in NH
- The commission discussed:
 - Pros and cons of official ballot voting
 - Default budgets
 - Future agenda items & guests to invite

May 17, 2023

- The Charter Commission heard from two invited presenters:
 - Secretary of State's Office – Bud Fitch
 - Department of Revenue Administration – Bruce Kneuer
- Review of Bedford voting data

May 31, 2023

- Prior to the meeting, commission members reviewed charters and ballots from Bedford, Derry, Durham, Hookset, Londonderry, Merrimack and Newmarket
- Invited Guest Presenters:
 - Town of Durham – Todd Selig, Town Administrator
 - Town of Londonderry – Michael Malaguti, Town Manager
 - PFM Financial Consultants – Stephen Maceroni
 - NH Municipal Association – Katherine Heck and Natch Greyes
- Public Hearing

June 21, 2023

- Public Hearing – members of the public shared their feedback
- Discussion – commission members discussed the merits and drawbacks of town meeting and official ballot voting
- Commission members agreed to form two subcommittees, one to draft proposed ballot changes and one to write the report

July 26, 2023

- Commission members reviewed the first draft of proposed changes to the Town Charter
- Commission members reviewed an outline of the commission report

August 9, 2023

- Commission members reviewed and revised an updated draft of proposed changes to the Town Charter
- Commission members agreed to share the draft change with the town attorney

August 23, 2023

September 6, 2023

September 20, 2023

Recommendation

Commission recommendation and reason

Note: From the [commission timeline](#) “After obtaining approval, the charter commission shall submit to the municipal officers its final report, which shall include the full text and explanation of the proposed new charter, such comments as the commission deems desirable, an indication of the major differences between the current form of government and the proposed charter, and a written opinion by an attorney admitted to the bar of this state that the proposed charter is not in conflict with the constitution or the general laws.”

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Proposed Charter Changes

Include charter changes here

Proposed March 2024 Warrant Article

Include the text of the warrant article which will appear in March 2024

Next Steps

The next set of steps can be broken down into three phases:

1. There will be a public hearing, tentatively set for xxxxxx, at which Bedford voters can ask questions of the Charter Commission Members as well as voice their opinions on this report. This is consistent with the multiple public hearings held throughout the preparation of the report as well as the public input received during the Commission's meetings.
2. There will likely be opportunities (BCTV et al) for those in support of the conclusions in this report, as well as for opponents, to voice their opinions.
3. In March, 2024, the Warrant Article as it appears in this report will appear on the Ballot. If 50% +1 of the voters approve, Bedford will become an official ballot voting town. If the Article does not achieve a majority, then Bedford's traditional method of voting at Town Meeting will continue.

Minority Report

Include minority report here

Appendix

Include important supporting info