

## 2018 Charter Review Commission: Frequently Asked Questions (9/27/18)

### **a. What is the City Charter?**

The Charter is the foundational governing document for the City of Saratoga Springs, which provides the legal framework for the City's form of government and the responsibilities of each elected official. Also included in the Charter are other required roles and certain practices and procedures. The Charter operates in conjunction with local laws, ordinances, and other policies approved by the City Council.

### **b. What form of government does Saratoga Springs employ?**

The City of Saratoga Springs utilizes the Commission form of government, in which members of the City Council typically serve as both the head of their department and a legislator who votes on City matters. The current City Council members are the Mayor, Commissioner of Finance, Commissioner of Public Works, Commissioner of Public Safety, and Commissioner of Accounts. Other forms of municipal government include "Mayor-Council," where the mayor has more authority compared to other elected officials, and "Council-Manager," where elected officials oversee general administration while the day-to-day operations of the municipality are managed by an appointed city manager. The 2018 Commission does not propose changing our form of government.

### **c. How old is our City Charter?**

Certain revisions to the Charter need to be approved by City residents through a ballot referendum, and the last successful Charter vote was in 2001. There have been several failed Charter votes since then, all of which attempted to change the City's form of government.

### **d. Why was the 2018 Charter Review Commission ("CRC") formed, and is it trying to change the form of government?**

While the existing Charter has served the City well, in the 17 years since it was approved by voters certain improvements and deficiencies have been identified. To address these issues, the 2018 CRC was formed on March 6, 2018 by Mayor Meg Kelly with the goal of finding efficiencies and organizational improvements to better serve the people who live and work in the City of Saratoga Springs, all within the framework of the commission form of government. The CRC's Proposed Charter will be voted on by City residents via a referendum in the November 2018 election.

### **e. Who is on the CRC?**

The CRC is made up of ten City employees and elected officials across political parties and all City departments. This group has an intimate knowledge of the existing Charter based on real-world experience and brought up many of the proposed revisions based on issues or ideas they, or their employees, have come across over the years.

### **f. What will be the referendum question on the ballot this November?**

There will actually be two referendum questions on voter ballots this November. The ballot questions are:

- (1)** Shall the Saratoga Springs City Charter be amended as proposed by the 2018 Charter Review Commission?
- (2)** Shall the Saratoga Springs City Charter be further amended to provide for two (2) additional City Council members whose authority shall be legislative only?

Ballot Question **(1)** refers to the 2018 Proposed Charter with enhanced efficiencies and organizational improvements and maintains the five member City Council. Ballot Question **(2)** refers to the 2018 Proposed Charter with enhanced efficiencies and organizational improvements but also increases the City Council to seven members. The initiative to increase the City Council to seven members allows voters to decide separately from the proposed updates and amendments to the Charter, in accordance with New York State Law. Expanding the City Council to seven members can only be enacted with a "Yes" vote on BOTH questions.

**g. Why is the CRC proposing to expand the City Council, and how would it work in practice?**

One benefit to forming the CRC on the heels of the 2017 effort is that everyone on the Commission is well-versed on the critiques of the existing Charter. One issue raised during the prior process was that some in the City thought the legislator and departmental demands of a City Council member held people back from running for office. To address this issue, the CRC proposed expanding the City Council to seven members, with the two new members serving as Council Members-At-Large who have equal legislative power as the other members but who won't oversee a City department. As these new Council Members-At-Large are not overseeing City departments, they would not require deputies.

**h. What other revisions are in the Proposed Charter?**

Other than expanding the City Council to seven members, amendments in the Proposed Charter can largely be broken down into six categories:

- Building on recent successes: this ranges from including all City Council members in the State of the City Address (rather than having it run solely by the Mayor) to requiring all deputies to have relevant experience and/or education for their position
- Increasing flexibility of City operations: having seen how a Charter may go almost 20 years without being revised, the CRC focused on giving the City flexibility to adapt as demands and resources change
- Realigning certain functions: the CRC moved certain responsibilities and functions between departments, such as the Recreation Department moving from the Mayor's Office to the Department of Public Works, which the CRC believes appropriate given Rec's reliance on Public Works for the maintenance of its fields and facilities
- Creating independence of appropriate offices: certain City employees and groups, such as the City Attorney, Human Resources, and Information Technology, serve the entire City Council, so the CRC viewed it critical that these professional roles report to the entire Council rather than an individual member, removing the appearance of one Council member having undue influence over an office and ensuring each has appropriate autonomy
- Removing unilateral appointments: given how many appointments play a critical role in how the City functions, the CRC believed it was appropriate that certain commissions, boards, and individuals serving City-wide functions be approved with advice and consent from the entire City Council rather than just a single member
- Improving consistency and readability of the Charter: the CRC assigned specific function to individual sections for clarity, and ensured each elected official has a similar template for their powers and responsibilities so that readers, be they City employees or residents, can clearly understand the document

**i. What has stayed the same from the existing Charter to the Proposed Charter?**

Along with keeping the commission form the government, the Proposed Charter largely mirrors the existing Charter in most respects. The layout is largely the same, though certain processes were moved to their own section later in the document (such as the Capital Budget process). The responsibilities and duties of the City Council members are largely consistent from existing Charter to Proposed Charter, and appointments powers reside in the same offices they did previously, though now they are at the advice and consent of the City Council. A recent poll conducted by the CRC showed that 75% of City respondents thought things in Saratoga Springs are going in the right direction, and to that end the CRC aimed to revise the Charter where we thought appropriate, while also ensuring the City follows in the footsteps of what has made it such a thriving and desirable City to live and work in.

**j. What is the Budgetary Impact of the Proposed Charter?**

A Financial Summary of the Proposed Charter is available on the City website. In aggregate, should Question (1) be approved by City voters, the expected financial impact is \$0. Should Question (2) also be approved by City voters, there would be additional expenses in the City budget. In this scenario, the salary and benefits for the two Council Members-At-Large would be determined by the City Council prior to the 2019 election. The CRC Financial Summary illustrates what that impact would be, assuming the current City Council salary of \$14,500.

*Thank you for your interest in the 2018 Charter Review Commission. More information, including upcoming events, meeting minutes, and how to contact the CRC, can be found on the City website. <http://saratoga-springs.org/charter>*