

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CHARTER COMMISSION

What is a Charter?

A Charter is a document that describes how a Town government is structured.

What is a Charter Commission?

Under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 43B, it is a group of nine registered voters of the Town elected to review and make recommendations for changes to the Charter.

How was Provincetown's Charter Commission created?

Following Massachusetts Law, a group of residents submitted a petition with the required number of signatures of registered voters to put on the Town ballot a question about creating a Charter Commission. At the May 3, 2016, Town Election, the vote was 644 to 268 in favor.

How were the Members of the Charter Commission chosen?

Nine candidates who sought election to the Charter Commission were listed on the ballot. All were elected.

Why does the Charter need to be reviewed and revised?

The Charter was last revised in 1990. Since then, there have been many changes in Town government, which are not reflected in the document. There are potential conflicts between the Charter and the Town By-Laws. In addition, the Charter is written in a style that may be difficult to understand, and the organization of the document is confusing, and could be streamlined. Because of the way the Charter is worded, the Town has had to seek legal assistance to interpret portions of the Charter, which can be costly.

How long will the process take?

By law, the process will take a maximum of 18 months. A Preliminary Report containing the rewritten Charter is due to the Attorney General at the end of August 2017 and a Final Report is due November 1, 2017.

What is the role of the Attorney General?

The Attorney General's office will review the revised document to assure consistency with State law before it is put to a vote by the Citizens of the Town.

Who decides whether the revised Charter will be adopted?

The decision as to whether to adopt the revised Charter rests solely with the registered voters of the Town of Provincetown. The revised Charter will be placed on the ballot for the 2018 Town Election, and the Town will vote to approve or reject the entire revised Charter.

Wasn't there a Charter Review Ad Hoc Committee that looked at the Charter?

Yes, the Board of Selectmen appointed an eleven member Charter Review Ad Hoc Committee (CRAH) in August of 2013. The CRAH met biweekly for a year and made significant progress in rewriting the Town Charter. However, during the year of the CRAH's initial appointment the membership of the Board of Selectmen changed significantly, and the newly composed Board directed the CRAH to refrain from addressing certain issues in the Charter. The consensus of the CRAH was that this instruction severely limited the Committee's proper function, and the CRAH was dissolved. The former members realized that an elected Commission would be more effective. Seven of the members of the CRAH were elected to the Charter Commission, so there is significant continuity regarding the work formerly done by the CRAH.

How can I participate in the process?

The law requires that the Charter Commission hold two Public Hearings - one at the start of the process (which took place on June 16, 2016), and one when the Preliminary Report is completed. The Charter Commission also plans to hold several Public Forums addressing specific topics. The Public can also attend any Meeting of the Charter Commission (the Meetings are held every Monday at 1 pm in Town Hall, except legal holidays), and there is an opportunity for Public Statements at the start of every Meeting. In addition, email comments can be sent to jperry@provincetown-ma.gov - a new email address that has been set up for the Charter Commission. Written comments can be submitted through the Town Clerk. You can also request that the Charter Commission send a member to attend your group's meeting.

How else can I find out what is happening with the Charter Commission?

The Charter Commission has a site on the Town of Provincetown website. Agendas and Minutes of Meetings are posted there. Additional information will be posted as it is developed.