

Charter Review Committee Public Survey Results

The survey does not present any statistically accurate picture of the opinion of the town population. It was intended as one of a number of methods to collect ideas from citizens who wished to comment. Ninety-one responses were received: fifty on paper and forty-one through Survey Monkey.

I. Aggregate count of Works Well/Needs Improvement Designations: WW/NI

Comment: In relation to every article of the Charter more respondents felt that the current structure is “working well” than that it “needs improvement”. A clear pattern is that town meeting members who responded on paper expressed a higher satisfaction with the Charter than other respondents.

Article	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Surveys from Town Meeting	26/4	24/6	25/4	20/10	18/12	24/7	21/10	20/10	24/5
Other paper surveys	5/14	10/9	4/15	12/7	11/8	14/5	8/11	14/5	16/2
Online survey	15/26	20/21	16/24	26/15	18/23	29/11	21/20	20/21	27/12
TOTAL	46/44	54/36	45/43	58/32	47/43	67/23	50/41	54/36	67/19

II. Summary of Respondents’ Comments by Article:

General Notes:

1. The bullet points below are an informal summary that attempts to capture the more commonly mentioned topics under each article of the survey.
2. Some respondents might have included a variety of topics within one comment.
3. Ideas mentioned only once under an article have not been included, unless where specifically mentioned. A full listing of all responses is posted in two links at the web-page, one for paper responses and one for electronic.
4. Ideas have been listed under the article number at which they were recorded even if a different article location might have been more applicable.
5. It is not accurate to add together the number of times an idea appears under different articles. One person might well have repeated the same idea in various locations.

Article I: Incorporation and Form of Government -- Total WW/NI count: 46/44

25 individual comments

- Most frequent area of comment (about 10) was a preference for a **mayor/city council** alternative.

- Several comments related to current **town manager** position: to require residency; to take stronger leadership; to be held more accountable for town department effectiveness.
- Several comments related to the **board of selectmen**: to be more full-time; to have citizen-focused office hours; to focus on big town issues; to coordinate with committees and manager.
- Several comments were about **boards and committees**: concern that they carry too much power; and lack time and expertise; and need to improve communication and coordination.
- A couple of comments focused on **Town Meeting**: concern for lack of time and full information; dominated by older members and needing more younger influence.
- A couple of responses were based on the feeling that some **groups and areas of town** were more frequently represented or exerted more influence.
- A couple of entries favored the **current system**, especially as people participate fully.

Article II: Representative Town Meeting -- Total WW/NI count: 53/36

19 individual comments

- About 5 comments dealt with need for **Town meeting members** to better educate themselves on warrant articles and to reach out to their constituents.
- About 5 wanted **warrant articles** to be more carefully vetted, more fully explained, and available with recommendations earlier before town meetings.
- Several comments on the **moderator**: sought stronger role to hold members accountable for ineffective behavior or suggested term limits.
- Several responses **Town meeting efficiency** is limited by too much time on minor details, too much uninformed questioning and comment, and poor presentations.
- A couple of comments urged that all **votes** be **publicly recorded** for accountability.
- A couple of comments focused on the **younger demographic**, needing encouragement to run for seats and needing needs better represented.
- A couple of entries felt Town Meeting is an important part of town government to ensure **equal representation** of the village areas.

Article III: Board of Selectman -- Total WW/NI count: 45/43

23 individual comments

- About 7 comments preferred **mayor/city council** form board of Selectmen because of perceived deficiencies in the current system.
- About 5 respondents preferred a change in the **size of the Board of Selectmen**: three wished an increases to 7 for more diversity of opinion and possible alignment with precincts; 2 wanted a reduction to 3 full-time selectmen as existed before the Charter.
- Several comments advised more **outreach effort** to the community, perhaps through quarterly meetings.
- Several entries asked that the Board play a **stronger role** relative to the manager and department heads though accountability measures and evaluation or exercising a more independent voice.
- Several people wanted **better coordination with other boards** and committees in part for better implementation of the strategic plan .

Article IV: Other Elected Town Boards -- Total WW/NI count: 58/32

17 individual comments

- There were multiple comments about **specific boards**:
 - Three comments question the need for a Library Board or would appoint it
 - Two people would reduce School committee size
 - One would elected the Board of Health
 - One would appoint the Planning Board
 - One would simplify the housing groups
- A couple of remarks advised more **scheduled communication and cooperation** of the Board of Selectman and other Boards.
- A couple of responses wanted **timely minutes available** to the public.

Article V: Town Manager -- Total WW/NI count: 47/43

30 Individual Comments

- About 7 comments related to the perception that the **manager** exercises too much **power** personally and through his department heads relative to the Board of Selectmen, whose coordination and knowledge are limited by time, and/or relative to other town boards and committees, similarly limited and weakened further by appointive relation to the Board of Selectmen.
- About 7 comments preferred an **alternate form of government**: mostly a Mayor form of government; but a couple preferring return to full-time, stronger selectmen.
- About 6 responses desired improved **communication** of Town Hall with the community.
- Several comments called for improved **oversight and accountability** for the manager and for department heads.
- Several comments either generally praised the **work of the manager or the assistant managers** (one suggesting a stronger freedom to create positions and pay ranges) or generally were critical of the functioning of the office.

Article VI: Citizen Participation -- Total WW/NI count: 67/23

19 individual comments

- About 9 responses expressed unhappiness with the use of **petitioner articles**: including more thorough vetting, better advance coordination with Town departments, more assistance in developing, limitation on repeated submission, increase number of signatures.
- Several entities expressed concerns about **excess absences** by Town Meeting Members, excused and unexcused.
- Several comments sought more **outreach to citizenry**: both to provide information (e.g. Citizen's Academy) and also to get input.
- A couple of responses urged that **citizens** need to strive for increased **participation and self-education**.

Article VII: Appointed Town Boards -- Total WW/NI count: 50/41

30 individual comments

- About 11 comments related to the need for the Board of Selectmen to provide more effective **support to committees** and boards, including paying more attention to recommendations, finishing the improved “committee handbook,” describing roles and missions more clearly, setting reasonable objectives, providing coordination and accountability, and offering training.
- About 7 entries were about the application of **term limits**: about 5 criticized the impact on filling positions, especially when candidates are not available; a couple favored the impact in opening positions.
- About 6 responses focused on the **appointment processes**: a need to attract more candidates, to make criteria for selection clearer, to reduce intimidation and the appearance of favoritism
- Several comments referenced that **not all appointed Boards** are represented.
- A couple of entries found **boards hostile and not aware of their responsibility** to both the Town as a whole and its individual citizens.
- A couple of comments wanted faster **publication of minutes**.

Article VIII: Financial Provisions and Procedures -- Total WW/NI count: 54/36

18 individual comments

- About 7 entries related to an altered **balance of authority between the Finance Committee and Town Hall** as the importance of the role of Finance Director has grown, some regretting the loss of authority of the FinComm or calling for a redefined role clearly connected to the legislative authority of Town Meeting.
- About 5 responses advised reducing **the size** of the Finance Committee.
- Several comments desired improved **budgetary information for Town Meeting**, with more budgetary collaboration, stronger future expense planning, quarterly reports by the Finance Director, and more timely recommendations by the Finance Committee.

Article IX: General and Transitional Provisions -- Total WW/NI count: 67/19

14 individual comments

- The only topic with more than one response (about 6 comments) was the **Charter Review process** as a guaranteed periodic review, but with concerns that recommendations need to be serious and implemented more quickly, with ideas about more or less frequent occurrence, and with a desire for broader scope.