

To: Select Board
From: Sue Salamoff and Frank Foss

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Proposed Town Government Study Committee

It is 40 years since Natick residents voted to adopt the Natick Town Charter. Prior to the charter taking effect in March 1981, Natick had a 5 member Board of Selectmen, an Executive Secretary, 16 elected boards, commissions and officers that included Public Works Commissioners and a 240 member Town Meeting,

Over a 10 month time frame established by the 1966 Home Rule Amendment to the General Laws of Massachusetts, the 9 elected Charter Commissioners met 39 times in public meetings, and issued a preliminary and then final report. Every department, officials, committees as well as town meeting members and interested citizens were invited to meet with the Charter Commission. The commission selected its own municipal legal counsel. He provided advice at every meeting. He educated the commission regarding the types of municipal governments and the intended and unintended consequences of the provisions that the commission was considering to adopt as we strove to create a better structure of government for the time we were living as well for the future.

At this time in our history, it seems prudent to evaluate the current structure of our town government and consider if there are more immediate changes that would create more efficiencies in the operation of our government as well as create better citizen access and ability to participate in their town government.

Noting that Natick's population is close to 37,000 persons and the town has \$162,000,000 budget, the following are some of the issues raised by interested citizens:

Do we need to have a Town Manager with increased authority to provide town services? Currently, the Select Board appoints several department heads; however, the Town Administrator is responsible for the daily operation of the town government.

Is a 180 member town meeting too large? In recent years the highest attendance at a town meeting is 130 members?

How will Natick conduct public meetings when the State of Emergency is discontinued? Some of our neighboring communities are beginning to see how they can develop a legal, technically safe model to have a hybrid of public and remote participation going forward. Local governments have found increased citizen participation with remote options.

Are the specific time periods for the selection process of candidates for top department head positions unrealistic?

Is the 5 year term of elected office too long?

Should there be term limits for elected or appointed Boards, Committees or Commissions?

Should Natick consider changing the overall structure of its government?

By chance, with a field of 19 candidates, the 9 member elected Natick Charter Commission had a combination of elected officials, a town employee and four citizens interested in Natick's town government. In addition, the commissioners selected the best person to serve as consultant. Not only was he municipal law attorney, he served as Canton's moderator and had been the director of what is the Mass Municipal Association, today. He later was called the Thomas Jefferson for municipal charters. As, I look back the combination of Treasurer-Collector, Assessor, Recreation Commissioner, Redevelopment Authority member, Assistant Town Clerk, and 4 citizens (one the Finance Committee, chair, one a Town Meeting member, one active in the League of Women Voters, and a small business owner provided a variety of perspectives throughout the process.

We propose the Select Board appoint a 9 member Town Government Study Committee to be composed of a present or past Select Board member, the Town of Natick Finance Director or designee, the Town Moderator and 6 citizens at large. At least two of the at large appointees should have served as a Town Meeting member for three years. The study committee shall provide a preliminary report to the Select Board within 6 months of being established. The report should include status of work and a plan to provide recommendations to the Select Board by 1- 15-2022. Municipal

counsel or consultant should be engaged to work with the Town Government Study Committee.