

**Charter Revision Commission
Draft Final Report (V3) Presentation to the Board of Selectmen
January 21, 2014**

Charter Revision Commission

**David Olson, Chairman
Nicholas Hoffman, Vice Chairman
Wendy Smith, Secretary
William Hillman
Paul Improta
Meghan O'Connor
William Shannon**

**Attorney Nicholas Vitti, Legal Counsel
Debra Roper, Recording Secretary**

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The Process

Convening of the Commission (September 2012)

Initial Public Hearing (October 2012)

Deliberations (September 2012 – January 2014)

Public Hearing of Draft Final Report (January 13, 2012)

Draft Final Report Presentation to the Board of Selectmen

Note: Draft Final Report revised following Public Hearing

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The Draft Final Report

**Report of the Commission – Summary Narrative (V3)
CRC Tracking Document (V8)
Summary of Charter Changes
Recommended Changes to the Charter**

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Item 1: Increase Board of Selectmen from Three to Five Members

- **Consistent with the Selectmen's charge to the Commission**
- **Greater representation for Bethel's increased population**
- **More stringent national, state and local regulatory environment**
- **Complexity and number of issues before the Selectmen**
- **Enables subcommittees and meeting of two members without constituting a quorum**

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Item 2: Increase Term of Board of Selectmen from Two to Four Years

- **Recognizes learning period for newly elected Selectmen: scope and responsibilities; town budgetary processes; personnel and management; regulatory environment; building relationships with surrounding communities, state and local officials and U.S. Senators and Representatives**
- **Strengthens appeal of the positions to well-qualified people**
- **Provides for continuity between administrations**
- **Reduces cost of municipal elections usually borne by a few**
- **Increases risk should voters elect weak candidates (State Statutes do not include a recall provision)**

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Item 3: Compensation of Municipal Officials

- **Desire to remove politics from compensation decisions**
- **Considered requirement to use recognized indices: comparable populations, ERG, DRG**
- **Agreed on Mr. Kingston's suggestion: Require the Board of Finance to set the compensation of elected officials (Registrars of Voters, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Selectmen and First Selectman) during the budgetary process preceding each municipal or state election.**

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Item 4: Change Date of Annual Town Meeting

- Request of the Tax Collector to provide more time to prepare tax bills, especially in the event the first budget referendum is unsuccessful**

Item 4 could be removed as a recommendation, leaving the first seven days in May as the window for the Annual Town Meeting, should an investment be made in improved software to shorten the time period required to produce tax bills.

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Item 6: Increase Threshold for Actions Requiring a Town Meeting

- **Current threshold is \$25,000 for approval of bonds, appropriations and grant acceptance.**
- **Not changed since 2003 (bonds & appropriations) and 2007 (acceptance of grants).**
- **Updating for today's financial realities**

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**Item 7: Sale, Purchase of Other Disposition of Town Real
Estate**

- **Clarifies Charter paragraph to include “other disposition”**
- **Addresses “old town hall” controversy**

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Item 9: Reference to full-time positions

- **Current Charter labels some classified employee positions as “full-time”, but not all. This is a matter of personnel policy fully covered by Chapter 19 of the Town’s Code of Ordinances**
- **References to “full-time” positions to be deleted as unnecessary in the Charter**

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Item 10: Change the Threshold for Advertised Bidding

- **Given the financial realities of our times, update the threshold for bids requiring advertisement from \$30,000 to \$50,000 (last amended in 2007)**

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Item 11: Recognize the Fire Companies

- **The current Charter is silent on the existence, responsibilities and operations of the Bethel and Stony Hill fire companies**
- **The Commission considered options for Charter inclusion: recognition, reporting relationship, a Fire Commission and a Public Safety & Emergency Services Commission**
- **For this revision Recognition, including the existence, responsibilities, operating requirements (Fire Company charters and state regulations), and reporting relationship to the Town is recommended**

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Item 12: Town Department Line Item Budget Review/Approval

- **Input received from the Public, the Board of Selectmen and Chairman Kingston**
- **Board of Finance Authority to extend to departmental bottom line budgets, not individual line items, excepting staffing and related personnel costs**
- **Departments possess the expertise to decide on line item changes to achieve BOF bottom line objectives**
- **Recommendation does not change BOF authority with respect to its town budget objectives**

Note: Charter requires budget presentation by line item. Board of Finance may suggest line items for reduction or elimination.

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Item 13: Special Appropriations and Transfers

- **The Commission recommends updating the threshold for Special Appropriations and Transfers from \$25,000 to \$50,000 to reflect today's financial realities.**
- **This Charter provision was last updated in 2003**

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Item 14: Budget Neutral Transfers

- **Update the Board of Selectmen's authority threshold from \$25,000 to \$50,000 within individual Town departments**
- **Improves management flexibility and operational efficiency**
- **Recognizes that budgets are established months before implementation and conditions change**
- **Does not allow an overall Town headcount change or encumbrance of future budgets without Board of Finance approval.**

Note: Section C8-13B (2) requires the Comptroller to report monthly to the Board of Finance the amount of any appropriation, transfer, encumbrance and expenditure.

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Item 16: Board of Education Special Revenue Funds Account

- **Requested by Mr. Craybas on behalf of the BOE**
- **Recognizes that the BOE receives funds external to State and Town resources (U.S. Department of Defense funding of the BHS NJROTC program, individual student contributions to the Student Activities Fund)**
- **External funds should not be co-mingled with general revenue.**

Note: This Item has been determined to be unnecessary as provisions in State Statutes provide the Board of Education with authority over special revenue funds. Additionally, the BOE and the BOF are converging on an appropriate agreement regarding these funds. The Item has been moved to Section II of the Tracking Document.

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Item 17: Location of Meetings

- **Responds to public input and Commission preferences**
- **Applies to all elected and appointed Boards and Commissions**
- **Regular and Special meetings to be held in the Municipal Center, Library or School facilities**
- **These facilities are readily accessible to the public**

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Item 18: Public Utilities Commission

- **Changes the PUC to a completely appointed Board (now consists of two appointed members and the BOS)**
- **Helps remove politics from rate-setting decisions**
- **Provides the opportunity to appoint knowledgeable members**
- **Includes responsibility for water, sewer and transfer station operations, organization, personnel, budgets and rate-setting (State statutes reserve rate-setting approval authority for the “legislative body” – the Board of Selectmen)**

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Item 20: Charter Paragraph C8-13(C-4ii), Comptroller

- The word “Controller” in line 4 should be “Comptroller” with a “p”.**