

Executive Summary

City of Taunton Charter

Introduction:

The Charter is the Constitution of Taunton, its governing document. The Charter is presently not actually one document, but is an archaic and unwieldy compendium of many special acts of the Massachusetts legislature that collectively comprise the Charter. It has been universally acknowledged that the Charter needs updating for decades. The Division of Local Services of the Department of Revenue recommended Charter changes. Both previous and current Charter Committees recommended changes. The Law Department has reviewed and concurs with the recommended changes contained in the proposed Charter being submitted contemporaneously herewith.

Summary:

The outline below details components of the update to our City Charter. This Charter creates a system of checks and balances and provides the proper and appropriate legal framework to benefit generations of Tauntonians. Governmental bodies are endowed with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and citizen participation measures are incorporated. This common-sense document provides financial safeguards and increased accountability in City government to benefit the people of Taunton.

Executive Branch

- Four-year mayoral term of office
- Term limit of three consecutive terms
- Mayor appoints all department managers subject to municipal council's approval
- Department directors appoint all department employees with approval of mayor
- Mayor's veto and municipal council veto override
- Upon a vacancy, the municipal council president is the interim mayor until a special election

Legislative Branch

- Municipal council possesses all legislative powers of the city
- Nine councilors, all elected at large
- Three year terms with annual elections for one-third of the council
- Term limit of four consecutive terms
- Elected municipal council president and vice president serve one-year terms
- Municipal council meetings will be held every other week and committee meetings will be held every other week
- Municipal council may require city officers to appear and give information

School Committee

- Nine members, eight elected at large plus the mayor
- Three elected each year and two every third year
- Three year terms
- Term limit of four consecutive terms
- Elected school committee president and vice president serve one-year terms
- Annually elect a school committee president and vice president

Elections

- Elections are governed by state law
- Preliminary elections are held to narrow the candidates to double the amount for the office
- Recall elections for any elected office require five hundred voters to sign an initial petition followed by fifteen percent of registered voters

Planning Board

- Seven members of the planning board
- Four elected and three appointed by the mayor
- Staggered terms of 3 years

Zoning Board of Appeals

- Five regular members of the zoning board of appeals and two alternate members
- Three regular members and one alternate member elected
- Two members and one alternate member appointed by mayor
- Staggered terms of 3 years

Capital Improvement Program

A mayoral report every two years with improvements needed to public buildings and major equipment

Audit Committee

An audit committee shall provide for an annual audit to be performed by a firm to audit the city's financial accounts

Transitional Provisions

- The Charter will be voted on in the 2021 city election
- The powers in city officials go into effect immediately after the 2021 election
- The new terms of office go into effect after and as a result of the 2023 election
- An ordinance review committee is created
- A charter review committee is created

Citizen Participation Mechanisms

- Citizen initiative petitions may be filed with 250 signatures followed by ten percent of registered voters. The municipal council must then approve or reject the petition. If it is rejected by the municipal council, an additional five percent of registered voter signatures would force a special election on the petition, where the voters could, by majority vote, enact the desired law.
- Citizen referendum petitions may be filed with fifteen percent of registered voters opposing an action of the municipal council. If the municipal council does not rescind the measure, a special election on the referendum will be held, where the voters could, by majority vote, rescind the measure.
- The municipal council may submit both binding and non-binding measures and public opinion advisory questions to the voters for consideration.