

## Minutes of the 2022 SALEM NH CHARTER COMMISSION

**Knightly Room at Salem Town Hall  
33 Geremonty Drive  
Salem NH 03079**

## Meeting #8: Wednesday, July 20, 2022

11 Present: Bernard W. Campbell (Chair), Joe Sweeney (Vice-Chair), Bonnie Wright  
12 (Secretary), DJ Bettencourt, Kevin Breen, Joseph Feole, John Janigian, Donna  
13 Loranger, and Kelly Moss.

15 The meeting was called to order by Chairman Campbell, at 7:00. Pledge of Allegiance.

17 Next meeting is Wednesday, July 27.

## Minutes:

## **Meeting of June 13, 2022:**

21 **Motion by Mr. Sweeny to accept minutes as submitted.** Seconded by Loranger.

22 **Vote:** 8-0-1. Minutes accepted as submitted. Mr. Feole abstained, as he was absent last  
23 week.

## New Business

Nichole McGee, Finance Director

27 **Nicole McGee, Salem's Finance Director:** Unsure of why she was here. If the Town's  
28 fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30, or Jan 1 to Dec. 31, it doesn't affect her  
29 workflow. There is a lot of work that we are able to do during the summertime: the  
30 road program and construction projects. A fiscal year starting June 1 could potentially  
31 delay the start of some projects. Right now, we can get a lot of larger construction projects  
32 started in April or May. With an election in March, we're able to get the procurement  
33 contract signed before the work actually begins.

34 Tax bills are typically due around July 1 and beginning to mid-December. We collect the  
35 majority of what we're going to collect by the December 31 fiscal year-end.  
36 If it's a June 30 fiscal year-end, depending on when that tax commitment goes out, our taxes  
37 may not be due until after the fiscal year-end. From a balance sheet perspective, our cash  
38 balance may not be as high if the taxes aren't due until a couple of days later. an advantage  
39 to June 30 would be from a cash flow perspective, because you're with the December 31  
40 fiscal year-end, and you're essentially collecting in arrears. So your first six months you're  
41 operating off the prior year's tax base and our tax budget, so we really don't have cash flow  
42 concerns. Salem has not had to do a tax anticipation note

43 The process to go to switch to a 230 fiscal year-end: We would have to implement an 18-  
44 month budget from January 1 to June 30 of that next year. There are three primary ways to  
45 fund this. You just do a one-time tax rate increase, that's approximately a 50% increase.  
46 There is special legislation. The second would be to establish a capital reserve fund many

1 years in advance and annually fund it to help offset the amount you'd have to raise. The third  
2 option is to do a bond which you pay over multiple years to ease the burden of the six months  
3 that you need to raise additional for taxation.

4 **Ms. Loranger:** Can't capital projects starting and stopping be taken care of through proper  
5 planning?

6 **Ms. McGee:** You have that right now where we have the election in March. Do you have that  
7 one time to get the appropriation or the authority you get to expend that money? If you say  
8 you have the project approved at the 2020 election in March, right now we can start spending  
9 that because we're three months into our fiscal year budget. If the fiscal year is July 1, if it  
10 were to be approved in March, we wouldn't be able to spend any of that money until July 1.

11 **Ms. Loranger:** But it wouldn't be part of the previous budget?

12 **Ms. McGee:** The project would get split up. Start the project in July, put it on pause as the  
13 weather starts starting to get bad, and then begin again in the spring.

14 **Ms. Moss:** You noted that Salem hasn't had to do any tax anticipation notes. If we're not  
15 collecting the money until July 1, where are we getting the money from January to July 1 to  
16 the December tax bill. We're basically already six months in advance.

17 **Ms. McGee:** Essentially we are six months in arrears.

18 **Ms. Moss:** The December tax bill, helps to fund July to December, but you're saying that money  
19 actually funds January to July?

20 **Ms. McGee:** Realistically, yes.

21 **Mr. Campbell:** The money we collect in July funds July through December and the money we  
22 collect in December funds January through July when we get the next tax bill, but it's all from  
23 the previous taxation. Is that my understanding?

24 **Ms. McGee:** Yes. So if we were starting a new community with no tax base, the first January  
25 through June would be through July's tax bill, so we are chasing every six months. So the  
26 taxes that we collected in July that were due in July are for the 2022 budget. So technically  
27 that money is covered as funding from January to June but Salem does not have a cash flow  
28 issue. So really, we do have enough money to float us till we collect those funds in the  
29 beginning of July.

30 **Mr. Feole:** It sounds like construction projects can stop early in the spring. Would municipal  
31 services prefer a calendar year because they wouldn't have that break in the summertime  
32 funding? And they wouldn't have an issue if the voters didn't approve the budget for work  
33 that was planned to happen at that July 1 fiscal year start date?

34 **Ms. McGee:** They do a lot of planning that goes into it. I think that they would want to stay on a  
35 calendar year but I don't want to speak for them.

36 **Mr. Feole:** Mr. Breen, what would the fire department prefer, a fiscal year or a calendar year?

37 **Mr. Breen:** I'm not going to speak on behalf of the fire department. I left that position seven  
38 years ago.

## 40 **Old Business**

### 41 **BUDGET AND DELIBERATIVE SESSION:**

42 **Mr. Campbell:** Response from New Hampshire Municipal Association regarding Senate  
43 Bill 2: We can adopt all the provisions of Senate Bill 2 under RSA 40. We can create and  
44 decide what items we want to put on the ballot. If we are going to vote on the budget, we are  
45 required under the RSA to have some format of public hearing and public input to vote and  
46 amend the budget if desired. It doesn't need to be called a deliberative session, but it  
47 would act like one.

1      **Mr. Breen:** Would this be in addition to the various public hearings throughout our budget  
2      process? I think it was identified as a problem with the last Charter Commission.

3      **Mr. Campbell:** That was my understanding, but I will follow up with Attorney Buckley for more  
4      specifics on what that needs to look like legally.

5

## 6      RECALL PROVISION

7      **Mr. Sweeney:** Did receive feedback back about the recall piece. However, I did not bring the  
8      email and I don't want to adlib. Will share with the committee.

9      **Mr. Campbell:** We know it's obviously limited in scope, but we'll look at the specifics of it next  
10     week, and then look at that next week.

11

## 12     Survey

13     **Mr. Campbell:** There were only 212 responses. We might not have done a strong enough job  
14     getting the word out. We only had a week; the other one was two weeks. Most of the  
15     responses last time came in during the first week. Completion rate was 83%; that's up a  
16     little bit; more actually finished it. It took people about three minutes and 48 seconds to  
17     finish. Most responses came in on 7/14 and 7/17.

- 18
- 19      • **Age?** Nearly 50% of the people who filled out the survey fell into the age  
20      bracket of 60 and above. Where are the young people? How are we not reaching  
21      them?
  - 22      • **Which polling place do you vote at?** Relatively even distribution. Reflected the  
23      town's population.
  - 24      • **When should we vote?** The overwhelming number of people who responded to  
25      this survey would prefer to see us keep the date of the election in March.
  - 26      • **Elect or appoint land use boards:** People prefer to elect the Planning Board and  
27      the Zoning Board
  - 28      • **Elect or appoint the tax collector?** 98 to 79 said appoint the tax collector (Town  
29      clerk is required to be elected under the state law.)
  - 30      • **Seven or nine counselors?** Tie vote most of the way, but in the end, seven  
31      pulled out ahead.
  - 32      • **Would Zoning Amendments impact decision to vote for charter?** Most said it  
33      wouldn't make them vote against the charter.
  - 34      • **Elect Councilors at-large or a mix of at-large and by district?** 63% in favor of  
35      a mix. 37% prefer at large. Mr. Campbell concerned about sample size. Previous  
36      survey indicated a preference for at-large, but this narrowed it down to just two  
37      options. Mr. Goodnow, the town moderator, will speak to the charter commission on  
38      logistical issues involved at next week's meeting. Mr. Campbell concerned about this.
  - 39      • **Source of info?** Facebook. Town website. Complaints about the lack of a local  
40      newspaper. Town website poorly organized. Word of mouth.

1      **Mr. Campbell: We need to promote our Public Hearing on Saturday, August 13 at**  
2      **10:00 at Salem High.** He is trying to get the auditorium instead of the television studio  
3      in case we have a large crowd.  
4

5      **Mr. Campbell:** One question dealt with when to hold the town election. Mr. Campbell  
6      obtained feedback from the Salem school board regarding Election Day. They spoke about  
7      it at their meeting on July 19. The school board did not take a formal vote or recommendation  
8      but there was a clear consensus that the school board would prefer to remain in March  
9      because it allows them the earliest opportunity to recruit new teachers and new staff. By  
10     holding off a budget approval process to April or May reduces the availability of the talent  
11     pool since they will be competing with other districts who will be approving their budgets in  
12     March. It will make it harder for them to recruit good candidates to fill vacancies that will be  
13     created or approved in the budgeting process. They would oppose a move to May. They  
14     would be amenable to an April day but they would oppose the move to May but their clear  
15     preference would be to keep the election in March.

16     **Mr. Bettencourt:** We need to treat these surveys as though they were polls, and polls represent  
17     a snapshot in time. They are not always accurate. What makes this one particularly difficult  
18     is the fact that we've got contrasting results from the first poll. The date or the month in which  
19     we hold elections is different from the initial survey. In support of moving it from March,  
20     as holding, a sign on a March election day can be cold.

21     A little bit more of a hospitable climate in a later month might advance the goal of driving  
22     increased voter turnout. Respects the reasoning put forward by the Salem School District  
23     regarding wanting to keep it in March for recruiting purposes and other things, but wonders if  
24     the reason that they would like to keep it where it is just because they've been on a streak of  
25     getting everything that they've wanted, and might not want to interrupt that windstream by  
26     potentially moving the date of the election. Perhaps April is a compromise.

27     Regarding planning board and zoning board issues, people are fairly split; it won't affect the  
28     outcome of the charter. They have voted to appoint the Tax Collector.

29     I think the distinction between having seven town councilors or nine will not be an issue under  
30     which people's vote hinges.

31     Councilors at-large or by a mixture of at-large and by district: Town voted on whether or  
32     not we wanted to have our state representatives elected in districts or at large. And the result  
33     of that was overwhelmingly to remain at large. There are two obvious nuances to that  
34     question. The first is that electing town officials is different from electing our state officials.  
35     The second nuanced aspect of this is it was never presented to voters whether or not they  
36     wanted to have state representatives, elected as a mix of at-large and district members.  
37     There are some cities that do that. And there are floterial districts.

38     **Ms. Wright:** Towns don't get to choose that. That is assigned by the state legislature.

39     **Mr. Bettencourt:** But again, I think that the legislature does what the local communities are  
40     asking for. I agree that this question is different from the question that was presented to  
41     voters when this came up previously, but the result back in 2018 was so overwhelming that  
42     this question makes me very, very uncomfortable. This issue could potentially affect  
43     people's decisions on whether or not to approve a new charter. We are really going to  
44     want a far wider sampling size.

45     Finally, in terms of news sources, again I wish we had a community newspaper. The Eagle  
46     Tribune is woefully not cited in the wordcloud. I think that that paper needs to really assess  
47     how it is covering this community. But until that time, it's social media. Hopefully, those who

1 run the big town Facebook pages will be willing to be a little bit more flexible in what they  
2 allow public officials, and others who would share information about what's going on in town  
3 will be a little bit more generous than they are at the present time.

4 **Ms. Loranger:** So, talking about contrasting results from the last survey to this survey, look at  
5 how much information we have sent out or that is available. To the people that are actually  
6 taking this survey, maybe it's not contrasting results, maybe they are more open-minded.  
7 They may be happy with what they've been hearing and that's why I think the contrasting  
8 results could be that more people are informed about what's going on.

9 Regarding question of wards and at-large vs. just at-large: The was an overwhelming vote in  
10 the 2019 election, that we don't want state reps to be in wards. We have been talking about  
11 incremental change, and we need 60% to vote on it. But keep in the back of your mind that  
12 we may go down that road of wards maybe in the next round of the of the charter  
13 commission. This does not mean it's off the table. So I'm just I'm just saying some of these  
14 results surprised me. I love the fact that it was dispersed over the five school voting locations.  
15 I really liked that. But again, I mean we have produced a lot of information. We've opened it  
16 up to what other towns are doing. This is not a hamlet of 5,000 people. I think that we kind of  
17 mentioned that many times. So that's my take on this. And I know it was a lesser group of  
18 people that that signed on to this but these people are the ones that are actually watching  
19 this so that they're more informed, I think, or could be more informed than the rest of them.

20 **Mr. Campbell:** I wish I had a question on here. Did you participate in the first survey? I agree  
21 with both Mr. Bettencourt and Ms. Loranger. I think the position is more nuanced in this  
22 question. It's also two entirely separate issues: local representation is much different from  
23 statewide representation. The key here is what we do in terms of town councilors would not  
24 apply to a state election; they are two entirely separate things. That's an important  
25 distinction that we would need to make. My biggest concern with all of this is it's an  
26 enormously small sample size. 200 people is less than a quarter of a percent.

27 **Ms. Wright:** One thing I want to point out, is that the question said "in other communities, such  
28 as Derry, some councilors are elected at-large." However, Derry does not elect at-large,  
29 they have a mix of at-large and by-wards. That wording could have skewed the people  
30 who liked what they heard from the Derry presentation. A mixture could have had even  
31 stronger support.

32 **Mr. Campbell:** That's a phrasing issue. That's not how I read it.

33 **Ms. Moss:** The 2019 initiative that went on the ballot was not "Should we elect State Reps all  
34 by ward or should we stay where we are?" It was, "Should we set up a commission to study  
35 this issue?" The commission, like the one we are on, would then make a recommendation.  
36 That information was not widely understood by the people that voted. And I think we may  
37 have gotten a different result on that vote, had people understood. That speaks to the need  
38 for us to be very clear with people when we put something on the ballot, exactly what it's  
39 going to do and what it's not going to do because you know, even people have we've been  
40 speaking about it. The general consensus is that was a vote for wards or no wards and that  
41 wasn't actually what the process is. I spoke with a friend of mine who was opposed to  
42 voting by wards. When I explained that the decision was a combination of wards and at  
43 large or all at large, she immediately liked the combination. I think people liked the idea of a  
44 mix. They don't like the idea of just one or the other. I think that bears out and these results.  
45 Even though this is a very small sample size, this is likely a very informed group, because  
46 the people who are taking the survey are the people who are paying enough attention to  
47 notice that we had a survey. The people who are going to vote aren't necessarily going to be  
48 as informed as this group themselves.

1      **Mr. Campbell:** Yes, maybe they're more informed, but at least one person did comment that  
2      they want us to put in term limits, which we can't legally do.

3      The August 13 meeting is going to be very important. It is my intention to take at least the first 10  
4      to 15 minutes of the meeting on the 13th and do an informational piece. This is where we  
5      are. This is what we've been considering. This is how it would be different. We'd lay out  
6      some options to whoever comes to that meeting to say. It may be the first time some of those  
7      people who come to that meeting have seen it laid out how our five-member Board of  
8      Selectmen works, operates and interacts with deliberative session and the voting. Here's  
9      how that might change under what we're talking about doing. And I'd like to take the first 15  
10     minutes of the meeting to do that, because I don't think it's been done effectively. Then, here  
11     you go; let's hear what you have to say. I'm going to encourage all of you to promote that  
12     meeting in your circles. I really want to get a sense from the community.

13     **Mr. Bettencourt:** Approximately 3,100 people voted in the March election. The response  
14     from the survey is about 6%. I agree with Kelly, that 6% are people who are locked in,  
15     informed and almost certainly came out to vote in March. My understanding is that the goal  
16     of this is how could we make reforms to encourage more people to get informed and come  
17     out? And what troubles me is to get to Kelly's point, the nuance in the 2019 question about  
18     wards versus at-large for State Rep. In my travels, and in my interaction with voters about  
19     that question, I didn't hear anybody telling me about the nuances of creating a commission  
20     that was going to look into and all of that, when I heard from people was Salem is 26 square  
21     miles large. We're not a community in big states where you have large towns by geography.  
22     We're a more geographically tied-in community. How do you create districts without  
23     creating massive confusion among the population? It's very difficult. And I know you  
24     disagree, Bonnie, but honestly, how do you square that? If you want to sell me on the idea  
25     that we should have a hybrid system, you've got to tell me how we educate voters to ensure  
26     that they're not going to get confused between who's my ward councilor, who's my at large  
27     council. I don't know how you do that, given a community as geographically compact as  
28     Salem is. Confusion could very well lead to people throwing up their hands and saying I don't  
29     know what's going on. I'm not informed well enough to be able to go out and engage in this  
30     process. The practicality of it is how am I going to be able to make sense of all of this? How  
31     am I going to know whom I'm actually talking with, whom I'm actually voting for? I don't have  
32     a good answer to that question. If you want to sell me on that you've got to make a  
33     persuasive argument. Bonnie says she does so I'll wait for it.

34     **Ms. Wright:** Watch the video from the meeting a few weeks ago when I talked about that. And  
35     look at how the City of Berlin and the City of Franklin, how they do it. They can do it. Salem  
36     residents are just as smart as they are, if not smarter.

37     **Mr. Breen:** It seems statistically relevant that of 212 responses, between 35 to 43 (17%) gave  
38     up after identifying how long they were Salem residents. Were they just curious? It looks like  
39     17% of the people who even bothered to look at the survey gave up after the first question  
40     or just decided to take a look to see what was being asked. I'd say that is statistically  
41     significant in terms of the sample size. I think people are curious, and I think people are  
42     eager to see what the product of our work has been. I agree with you that the most  
43     important thing would be that August 13th meeting and getting people out. I was very  
44     disappointed having fewer than a dozen people 12 years ago. I really implore everyone to  
45     come and give us your perspective. We will be polite, and respectful; you can have your  
46     opportunity. But it's nice to hear from people directly.

1      **Mr. Campbell:** One of the things that came up both times is the word transparency and we're  
2      trying very hard to give as much transparency as we possibly can. So please, please, come  
3      to the meeting.

4      **Mr. Breen:** I have a little bit of experience working for this community, but I also work in another  
5      community now that is 25.4 square miles and it's a city. That city is governed by a mayor and  
6      11 councilors and I've never seen a more efficient government. I haven't formed an  
7      opinion, but have leaned towards all at-large. The councilors show up at all committee  
8      meetings representing their neighborhoods, and it just works. It's encouraging to see  
9      counselors show up at a meetings about issues that their citizens care about. I'm seeing it  
10     work effectively in a city of approximately the same size square miles and residents. It's very,  
11     very similar where I work to this community and it works for them it works so I do think it's  
12     going to work and I agree with Bonnie it's going to work either way. It's a question of change.

13     **Ms. Loranger:** To DJ's point, we would not be the first town to go from an at-large group  
14     towards a mix; there are other towns in New Hampshire that did that. There's information out  
15     there that can help us migrate. We can learn how they advertised or how they informed  
16     their voting public as to how this happened. Other towns have been through this, and didn't  
17     collapse under the weight.

18     Please, please come to the third on the 13th to the high school auditorium. The second point I  
19     wanted to make was what if the turnout there is like 30 people? Then it's the loudest voice  
20     that shows up.

21     **Mr. Campbell:** At some point after the August 13 meeting, we will have to make a final decision  
22     and we will have to commit to it. Hopefully, it is a decision that we can consensus with to say  
23     this is where we're going to go and then we'll just have to go out there and sell it.

24     My vision: Wrap this up by the end of August, and get it off to the lawyers and hopefully we get  
25     it back approved. After we get final approval from the lawyers, we send it off to our  
26     Selectmen, several of whom are in the audience right now. And they put it on the ballot in  
27     March. We probably won't meet often, maybe a couple of times in the fall, but I will likely  
28     call us back into session in January, to divide up and conquer some campaigning. The  
29     important thing at this point is to get a charter passed. It could be amended later on. Maybe  
30     we all don't get everything we want out of this process, but if we go without a plan, we will  
31     lose it. Those are the hard decisions that we're going to have to make after the meeting on  
32     the 13th.

33     As I said, Mr. Goodnow is scheduled to come next week to discuss logistics. I've asked him to  
34     tell us, from a moderator's perspective, what does this look like? What would the steps have  
35     to be taken? Because as I said, you know, even if I feel that it's not the direction we should  
36     go, I feel that we should do our due diligence and ask as many questions as possible. I felt  
37     bringing Mr. Goodnow in at this stage was an important thing.

38     **Mr. Sweeney:** I thought the previous survey really squashed but it definitely does bring it back  
39     alive again. However, I still think what we heard in the first survey was people are looking for  
40     incremental, small changes. I think a lot is going to hinge on what Mr. Goodnow says next  
41     week in terms of the logistical situation we would find ourselves in because I think that is  
42     something we would have to as a charter commission, spell it out as to how it gets divided.  
43     We could combine districts; two polling locations vote for a slate of folks and three locations  
44     will for others. When comparing Salem, to other cities that exist, like Franklin and Berlin,  
45     Dover, Manchester and Nashua, these were mill cities, hundreds of years ago. When they  
46     first divided their wards the population was very segmented by wealth, by race, by religion.  
47     That made the drawing of ward lines beneficial to one group over the other. We don't have

1 that breakdown in the culture and the history of Salem. Yes, there are cities that have the  
2 same geographic size as Salem North Salem the southeast part of Salem that borders  
3 Pelham are still Salem. Besides this one survey, I've never seen an overwhelming desire  
4 to split up the town into smaller districts for the election of any office. The 2019 question was  
5 to form a commission to explore the possibility of splitting the town up for state  
6 representatives. I think people saw that commission would divide the town up and they  
7 wanted to avoid that. I do worry that throwing this into the charter will make this a poison pill.  
8 But I'm open to hearing what the voters say on August 13. I'm looking forward to listening to  
9 Mr. Goodnow next week about the logistics of the whole endeavor. Our ultimate goal is  
10 getting a charter that can pass.

11 **Mr. Janigian:** The age bracket is really interesting. 70% of everyone that took the survey was  
12 50 plus. So where are all families? There's a lot of people below the age of 50 that didn't  
13 take the survey. We need to make an appeal to younger people for August 13. Mr.  
14 Chairman, I agree with you that we should talk about issues and things we are considering.  
15 It will help keep things more focused. I'd like to say "these are the things that we're working  
16 on. Here's what we're thinking, what do you think about these specific things?" We should  
17 guide the discussion. I am looking forward to seeing what Mr. Goodnow has to say. I  
18 personally would rather have seven or nine people representing me and every other person  
19 in town.

20 **Mr. Campbell:** We can look at students who require some service hours to see if we could set  
21 up some childcare which might encourage younger families to come out. I'll look into that.

22 **Mr. Bettencourt:** Bonnie, in response to you, I don't disagree with you that there have been  
23 communities who have made the transition. The important question to me is what  
24 communities have made the transition from a town to a town council to a city that have  
25 done it in a way that has been beneficial to the community. At one of our first meetings,  
26 Commissioner Jasper told us that his community went from a board of selectmen to a town  
27 council, and some years went back and said "This change did not benefit our community.  
28 We need to go back to what we had. "Change for the sake of change doesn't always get you  
29 to where you want to go. It has to be beneficial to your community.

30 Bonnie cited Berlin and Franklin as smaller communities that elect town councilors or aldermen  
31 by wards. That has nothing to do with the intelligence of anybody in Berlin or Franklin versus  
32 the intelligence of anybody in Salem. I won't insult the people of those communities to make  
33 that suggestion. They have culture, tradition, history, familiarity, and repetition. Those  
34 things matter. They used to be very large paper mill communities. They're not the same  
35 today as they were back then. But the history and the repetition in the culture remains, and  
36 so it works for those communities. To save Salem's history, our culture, and our traditions  
37 matter, too. Just because it's worked for Berlin and Franklin to have districts doesn't mean  
38 it's going to work perfectly fine for Salem. What you're asking Salem to do is to upend its  
39 tradition. It may work. I don't know. But it may not.

40 Kevin, I don't know the history, tradition, and culture of the communities that you've seen where  
41 this all works from. I've lived all 38 years of my life in Salem, I can only tell you what I think  
42 works here.

43 Donna, you have great point. What are we to do if we only get 30 people at the next public  
44 hearing? I hope that doesn't happen. We want a really large turnout. But if 30 people show  
45 up, I think that what we have to fall back on is that each and every one of us here tonight was  
46 elected by the voters who turned out and wanted to represent them to be their voice in this  
47 process. So I think at the end of the day, we have to do the very, very best we can to use our  
48 best judgment and to do the best we can to ascertain what we feel the will of the people of

1 this community is. We may get it right, we may get it wrong. We'll find that out at the end  
 2 when people vote to approve it or not. Each of us has to think carefully where we think our  
 3 fellow citizens are and we can very well end up coming in at very different places.  
 4

5 **Organization of 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the Charter Framework**

6 (Continued from previous weeks)

Style:	Town Council
# of Councilors:	7-9
Elected:	???
Voting Day	March
Fiscal Year	Jan 1-Dec 31 (no change)
Budget Committee	Yes
Elected Land Use Boards	Elected
Tax Collector	Appointed
Initiative/Referendum Threshold (Citizen's petitions)	100 signatures to force the Council to review, 10% of the people who voted in the previous municipal election to put an item on the ballot.
Recall	Need recall provision
Deliberative Session	
Vote on Budget	Ballot vote
Vote on Bond Articles	Yes, 3/5
Vote on Zoning Ordinances	No (Council have a super majority?)
Master Plan Update?	Every 10 years, tied to census
Capital Update?	Every 10 years on the ballot?
Capital Improvement Plan?	Include in the charter
Ethics Board	
Economic Development Committee	
Parks & Recreation Committee	

8  
 9 **Mr. Campbell:** We still have a lot of question marks, leaving the ward issue alone for now.  
 10 Seven or nine councilors is connected to whether or not we have wards. If we go all at-  
 11 large, probably I would recommend the seven number but if we were going to do a mix, I  
 12 think it would be more appropriate to do nine in the model that Bonnie proposed a couple of  
 13 weeks ago.

14 Given the school board's recommendation and the survey responses, March probably seems to  
 15 make the most sense.

16 **Ms. Moss:** Hitting people with a 50% increase in their taxes is just a nonstarter. Salem has  
 17 enough cash flow that we don't need to bond now. That wipes out a lot of the benefit. If it's  
 18 going to cost us money to do it, I don't think the town will want to do it. I sympathize with the  
 19 school, having been a teacher and having graduated and looking for a job. I don't want to do  
 20 anything that's going to split the school's election from the town; that's too much confusion. I  
 21 don't want to disadvantage the school in their ability to hire and do purchases. So as much as  
 22 I personally think April and May would be better. It probably does make sense to stay as is.

1      **Mr. Campbell:** The fiscal year question is entirely separate from the voting month. They don't  
2      they don't have to be tied together.

3      **Ms. Moss:** Agreed, but they're somewhat tied, because if we wanted to move to May, we would  
4      have to go to a fiscal year, but in April we could both.

5      We have trouble getting the word out to voters and changing the date of the election is going to  
6      probably be a big hit to people understanding when they're supposed to vote. I reluctantly  
7      say we should keep it up like it is.

8      **Mr. Feole:** Would prefer to keep the municipal election in March. It's what the town knows. It's  
9      what the town's used. Changing the election date to April or May is not going to make any  
10     difference in turnout.

11     **Mr. Campbell:** I know that. Snowbirds vote with absentee ballots, so people are still voting even  
12     if they're not here. I'm going to pencil it in at least tentatively is we're going to keep that in  
13     March.

14     **Mr. Feole:** As I brought up previously to the finance director, I think it'd be beneficial for the town  
15     just to keep it on a calendar year, because of all the construction that takes place.

16     **Mr. Janigian:** I also would agree. I could go either way, but it sounds like there are more  
17     advantages to leaving it as a calendar year.

18     **Ms. Loranger:** So just to go back to the fiscal year, a bit. I wonder how other towns that have  
19     their fiscal year starting in July handle road programs or construction starts. It's the first 18  
20     months when it would be kind of funky. And then it would drop in. The whole thing about  
21     construction and all that type of stuff is done in other towns.

22     **Mr. Campbell:** My only experience is with the school district. Construction starts July 1, but we  
23     do prep work in advance. At Woodbury, the facility staff stripped furniture and the walls,  
24     but construction fences didn't go up until July 1, and the first construction worker didn't walk  
25     onto the site until then. That's when they can start spending their money. But if you want to  
26     start milling and grinding a road, you have to wait till July to start, unless it's encumbered  
27     from the previous year. That requires a different level of planning. You end up doing your  
28     roads in phases.

29     **Mr. Breen:** I just want to be clear for anyone watching the differences from the communities  
30     that they may have resided in. I work for a city. The city does not wait until July 1. However,  
31     they have a council that is the governing body, and there is no voter approval of the  
32     budget. We do capital projects, and it doesn't wait until July 1, but it does encompass two  
33     different budget years.

34     **Ms. Moss:** We snowplow. That crosses fiscal years. We approve the money in March and then  
35     the rest of the snow plowing comes in the next year. We could start a project in April. It  
36     would just have to be approved the prior year, which takes planning. It might be more difficult  
37     to plan something that far in advance because you're getting a quote 9 or 10 months before  
38     you start, versus approving it three months before you start. It's more logically complicated  
39     to approve the funding so far in advance. You could be approving funds 13 months in  
40     advance.

41     **Mr. Feole:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I actually asked quite a few people on this one. I got  
42     numerous responses from respondents who said they would not vote for a charter if it took  
43     away electing the zoning and planning boards. I personally would like to see them  
44     appointed, but I do appreciate the democratic process.

45     **Ms. Moss:** I agree with Mr. Feole. People don't want to give up that control. I also think that the  
46     voters want incremental change. We really need to think about what problem are we trying to  
47     solve? I think we should err on the side of sticking with the way that we have done.

1      **Mr. Campbell:** I don't think voting or appointing the Tax Collector is going to make people  
2      vote yes or no. It is highly technical, and requires a certain degree of skill and education so I  
3      don't think it should be an elected position, but I'm open to other people's thoughts on the  
4      board.

5      **Mr. Bettencourt:** Voters have said in the past that they want to retain voting for the tax  
6      collector. But I'm with you. I think it should be appointed.

7      **Mr. Campbell:** This is something we could present to the community on the 13th.

8      **Ms. Moss:** I think having an appointed Tax Collector does make sense. The risk of one  
9      unqualified or uninformed person getting onto the Zoning or Planning boards isn't going to  
10     necessarily destroy their work, but the tax collector is very important. If someone who had no  
11     idea what they were doing and no skills or qualifications ended up in that position, it could be  
12     very detrimental to the town. Appointed makes the most sense.

13     **Mr. Breen:** His wife is the Tax Collector, and she is capable and qualified. They had a lot of  
14     discussions about this when she decided to run. I cannot disagree with what I'm hearing in  
15     terms of having a qualified person in that position. One aspect we probably don't know:  
16     The state says you have an elected Tax Collector, and they report to the voters.  
17     Otherwise, the Town Manager is the Tax Collector. The Town Manager then may appoint a  
18     Deputy Tax Collector, who reports to him. People may not know this. My wife likes working  
19     for the voters. She likes answering to the voters.

20     **Mr. Campbell:** Let's pencil that in as appointed but we can revisit that as necessary. We've  
21     already discussed the initiative and referendum thrilled. We're waiting till next week to deal  
22     with the recall. I would like to take a week to digest the legal advice we got on the question  
23     about the deliberative session. I think we're all still in agreement that we'd like to hold a vote  
24     on the budget and the bond articles. We said we would let the Council decide on the  
25     zoning ordinances.

26     **Ms. Wright:** Did you want to say that we would let the council have a supermajority on that?

27     **Mr. Campbell:** We can make a note here in that framework that we were thinking of having a  
28     council supermajority for zoning ordinances. Master Plan update every 10 years, tied to the  
29     census. We talked about including a charter update last week. Capital Improvement Plan  
30     to be included in the charter. I don't know if any of the rest of you had a chance to look at  
31     things like including the Economic Development Committee. There are certain committees  
32     here in town that we will want to make sure get into the charter. Council on Aging?  
33     Recreation Advisory Committee? What freedom do we want to give the Councilors to set  
34     up committees versus which ones do we want to enshrine in the charter? I wanted to read  
35     up more on the ethics commission.

36     **Bonnie Wright:** We have a problem with our email system. When someone sends an email  
37     from the form, it's not going to all of us. We did have an email that was sent today, from  
38     Carla Billingham. I have resent it out to everybody. She wants an Ethics Committee, and  
39     she would like to have an Economic Development Committee. She served on that in the past  
40     and felt that it could be better utilized. She asked for the master plan to be included and a  
41     Capital Improvement Program. That's the summary of what she asked for.

42     **Ms. Moss:** I would very much like to have an Ethics Board put into the Charter. I think one of the  
43     big pieces of feedback we've gotten is a lack of trust in the elected officials. A strong ethics  
44     process is going to help improve citizens' trust of elected officials. I also think Recreation  
45     should be something that is enshrined in the Charter. In our town motto, recreation is one of  
46     the three pillars.

1      **Mr. Feole:** I would like to see a Parks and Recreation Committee enshrined in the Charter. But I  
2      want to revisit that again next week, to do some homework on this topic.

3      **Mr. Campbell:** Next week Mr. Goodnow to talk about logistics of how zones are created  
4      currently and how those lines are drawn. Mr. Sweeney will bring us the information he has  
5      on the recall issue.

6      The takeaway from tonight's meeting is that we are just waiting until **August 13**. We need to  
7      spend some time talking that up. Please reach out to the various political organizations in  
8      town, protective associations with lakes, community service organizations like the Chamber  
9      of Commerce, Elks, Lions, Rotary, VFW, Soccer groups, T-Ball, Little League. The  
10     more people we can have come to that meeting, to hear and to listen and to potentially come  
11     in the better as far as I'm concerned. I really want to get a sense from the community.

12

### 13      **Public Comments:**

14

15      **Ms. Jamie Thornock, 5 Brookdale Rd:** We should recognize that we have 19,138 registered  
16      voters. In March, we had 3,908 people come out to vote. That's a 20% turnout, which is  
17      actually better than some big city sometimes. 70% of the demographics [for the survey]  
18      were coming from a large amount of older population. You're going to get answers based on  
19      what that older population wants, not with the younger population, which means that you  
20      can't actually trust what you just got.

21      Your all are doing great when it comes to transparency: Notes, the agenda, the meetings, it's all  
22      out there. The problem is the only people who know about it, are the people that have  
23      already known about it. That goes back to the people who show up at the deliberative  
24      sessions, the people who do the surveys. You want to reach out to the people who don't  
25      know, and you're not going to get those people they aren't on Facebook or the Eagle  
26      Tribune. You're actually going to have to send them something in the mail. Yes, it costs  
27      money. But you can go to Selectmen and ask them for money, once you know how much  
28      you need to spend.

29      I will say that some of the people that I did talk to about the survey felt a little like they were  
30      pigeonholed into the answers that they hadn't had to give. They didn't realize that the Charter  
31      Commission has already decided to go for the town council. When they're asked questions  
32      regarding a town council, they're like, well, but I don't want a town council. That's another  
33      reason why you might not have gotten the full answers on what you were asking. I think  
34      what's going to be your big factor, deciding between your seven and nine out of all of the  
35      charter that I've been reading through a lot of them discuss salary. If you can, get that out of  
36      the way right away. If you're not giving council members a salary, that might actually help  
37      people decide because when we start talking money, they're ... You're talking about  
38      appointments, right? But you're also trying to get paid. A lot of times appointments are made  
39      based on whom you know, not necessarily if you're the best person. If you want people to  
40      trust the process more, you leave as much to be elected as possible. Just little changes and  
41      incremental change, not much change everything all at once. With just the fact that you're  
42      going with a town council instead of what people are used to ... that's a big change.

43

44      **Mr. Brian Thornnock:** You have touched on the demographics and the validity of the survey.  
45      The only place that the survey was advertised was on Salem's Facebook pages. Younger  
46      folks are on Facebook to communicate with parents; they aren't on Facebook to get  
47      involved with other things. What those people told you doesn't hold any weight when it

1 comes to what the population of this town wants. There are other methods. The PTA didn't  
2 purge their contact information for the summer. An 8.5 x 11" paper about the 13th August  
3 meeting in the required two places in town isn't going to bring in many attendees.  
4 You know, as residents and citizens we shouldn't be taking responsibility. But they don't know  
5 what they don't know. I know it's tough. I don't have all the answers. But I will tell you that the  
6 data that you're if you're working off those surveys, you're working off of a such a narrow  
7 draft. This last survey had fairly binary choices. That was by design to some extent. There  
8 were no options that said "I don't like any of these options" so if the question wasn't  
9 answered, perhaps it was rejected. I'm not going to tell you I want something if it totally goes  
10 against what I want just because I have a binary choice.

11 And that's what we were left with. I did not do this survey. And that that was on purpose. I'm not  
12 going to give you my approval to do something because it's the lesser of two evils. If I don't  
13 get a third option, I'm going to let you guys decide, and I'm going to vote at the voting booth.  
14 That's associated with the data you get on the surveys and I don't think there's any validity  
15 checked out. And once again, the challenge because of how it's advertised more than  
16 anything else.

17

18

19 Mr. Bettencourt left at 8:35.

20

21 **MOTION BY Mr. Sweeney to adjourn.** Seconded by Ms. Moss.

22 **Vote:** 8-0-0

23 Meeting adjourned at 8:51.

24

25 Minutes taken by: Bonnie Wright

26 Minutes Approved: Salem 2022 Charter Commission

27 Date: July 27, 2022

28

29

30 **Video:**

31 The video of this meeting may be viewed at:

32 <https://www.facebook.com/sctv17/videos/352694800394104>

33 <http://sctv-17.com/CablecastPublicSite/search?channel=1&query=charter%20commission>

34

## 35 Charter Commission Meeting Schedule

36

37 10<sup>th</sup> meeting: **Thursday, August 4, 7pm,**  
38 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

39 **11<sup>th</sup> meeting: Saturday, August 13, 10am, PUBLIC HEARING,**  
40 **Media Center, Salem High School**

41 12<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, August 17, 7pm  
42 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall

43 13<sup>th</sup> meeting: Wednesday, August 24, 7pm  
44 Knightly Room, Salem Town Hall