

A PUBLIC MEETING OF THE CAMBRIDGE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

April 11, 2023, @ 5:30 p.m.
REMOTE ONLY – VIA ZOOM

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation at meetings of the Cambridge Charter Review Committee.

The zoom link is: <https://cambridgema.zoom.us/j/83253118929>

Meeting ID: 832 5311 8929

One tap mobile +13092053325,,83253118929# US

Agenda Items – Tuesday, April 11, 2023

- I. Roll Call 5:30 PM
- II. Introduction by Chair, Kathy Born
- III. Adoption of Meeting Minutes from the meeting of March 28, 2023
pg. 4-9
- IV. Meeting Materials Submitted to the Committee to be placed on file
 - Communications from Committee Members
 - Communications from Council Members
 - Communications from the Public
 - i.* A communication was received from Lin Trever, regarding support for 2-year council terms, city manager for the chief executive, a combination of district and at-large city councilors, and maintaining the council election of mayor
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 - ii.* A communication was received from Justin Saif, regarding support for maintaining an all-at-large city council
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 - iii.* A communication was received from Maritza Soto, regarding support for a strong mayor system
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 - iv.* A communication was received from Ellen Mei, regarding support for a strong mayor system
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 - v.* A communication was received from Mary Jane Kornacki, regarding support for a strong mayor system
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- vi. A communication was received from John P, regarding support for a city manager system, 2-year terms for city council, an all-at-large city council, and maintaining the council election of the mayor
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- vii. A communication was received from Dan Sprague, regarding opposition to ward-based city council
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- viii. A communication was received from Rachel Leicher, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- ix. A communication was received from Eric Colburn, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- x. A communication was received from Michael Copacino, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- xi. A communication was received from Jan Devereux, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- xii. A communication was received from Matt Goldstein, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- xiii. A communication was received from Amanda Sindel-Keswick, regarding opposition to a ward-based city council
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- xiv. A communication was received from David Sullivan, regarding support for a strong mayor system and maintaining an all-at-large city council
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- xv. A communication was received from Steven Miller, regarding support for a strong mayor system and maintaining an all-at-large city council
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- Other Meeting Materials
 - i. Legislative Branch Deliberation Planning Document
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V. Public Comment

- Members of the public are invited to share their ideas or comments with the committee.

VI. Form of Government Discussion and Vote

- **Facilitator:** Anna **Goal:** Discussion and sharing of opinions on the questions:

- i. Where do you stand - Should the head of the executive branch be an elected official (strong mayor) or remain an appointed position by the city council (city manager)?*
- ii. If the majority/leaning of the committee is opposite your opinion, what is most important to you to try and address to earn your consensus?*

VII. Legislative Branch Discussion

- **Facilitator:** Anna, Mike & Libby. **Goal:** Round Table Discussion, Sharing of Opinions from Members to answer the questions:
 - i. Should City Council be made up of all at-large members or include all or some district members?*
 - ii. Should City Council term lengths change or remain 2 years?*
 - iii. Should the current process for electing the mayor remain (councilors elect a mayor from among the members), or change to a direct election by voters?*
 - iv. Should the number of councilors increase, decrease or remain (9 members)?*

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE
CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Kathleen Born, Chair
Kaleb Abebe
Jessica DeJesus Acevedo
Mosammat Faria Afreen
Nikolas Bowie
Kevin Chen
Max Clermont
Jennifer Gilbert
Kai Long
Patrick Magee
Mina Makarious
Lisa Peterson
Ellen Shachter
Susan Shell
Jim Stockard

The Cambridge Charter Review Committee held a meeting on Tuesday, March 28, 2023. The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:30p.m. by the Chair of the Committee, Kathleen Born. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this meeting was remote via zoom.

At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Kaleb Abebe – Present
Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Absent*
Mosammat Faria Afreen – Present
Nikolas Bowie – Absent*
Kevin Chen – Present
Max Clermont – Present
Jennifer Gilbert – Present
Kai Long – Absent*
Patrick Magee – Present
Mina Makarious – Absent*
Lisa Peterson – Present
Ellen Shachter – Present
Susan Shell – Present
Jim Stockard – Present
Kathleen Born – Present

Present – 11, Absent – 4. Quorum established.

***Members Jessica DeJesus Acevedo and Kai Long were marked present at 5:37p.m.**

***Member Nikolas Bowie was marked present at 5:35p.m.**

***Member Mina Makarious was marked present at 6:30p.m.**

The Chair, Kathleen Born recognized member Ellen Schachter who made a motion to adopt the meeting minutes from February 28, 2023, and March 14, 2023. The motion was seconded by member Lisa Peterson.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the role.

Kaleb Abebe – Yes

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Absent

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Yes

Nikolas Bowie – Yes

Kevin Chen – Yes

Max Clermont – Yes

Jennifer Gilbert – Yes

Kai Long – Absent

Patrick Magee – Yes

Mina Makarious – Absent

Lisa Peterson – Yes

Ellen Shachter – Yes

Susan Shell – Yes

Jim Stockard – Yes

Kathleen Born – Yes

Yes – 12, No – 0, Absent – 3. Motion passed.

The Chair, Kathleen Born recognized member Jim Stockard who made a motion to adopt communications from Committee Members and the public. The motion was seconded by member Mosammat Faria Afreen.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the role.

Kaleb Abebe – Yes

Jessica DeJesus Acevedo – Yes

Mosammat Faria Afreen – Yes

Nikolas Bowie – Yes

Kevin Chen – Yes

Max Clermont – Yes

Jennifer Gilbert – Yes

Kai Long – Yes

Patrick Magee – Yes

Mina Makarious – Absent

Lisa Peterson – Yes

Ellen Shachter – Yes

Susan Shell – Yes

Jim Stockard – Yes

Kathleen Born – Yes

Yes – 14, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

The Chair, Kathleen Born opened public comment.

Liz Speakman spoke in support of keeping the same form of government that the City has had with a strong City Manager and believes that a strong Mayor would be risky.

Marilee Meyer shared they do not want to see more power from the Council and asked that the current system stays in place.

Valerie Bonds supported the same comments made by previous speakers and shared the City Council is not ready for a four year term.

Stephen Cellucci thanked the Committee for taking time to discuss the future of the City and spoke in support of a strong Mayor.

Jesse Baer spoke in favor of a strong Mayor and shared that politics is democracy and politics is under a threat and this is not the time to be moving away from politics.

Suzanne Blier spoke in favor of keeping the City Manager for now to see how the new City Manager is in his new role. She offered suggestions around the possibility of residents voting for the Mayor during Council elections.

Robert Winters offered many suggestions on updating and reformatting the current Charter and shared that giving the Election Commission more flexibility in some of the ways things are done would be beneficial.

Heather Hoffman offered comments around proportional representation and shared that done correctly, politics is the art of getting somewhere by bringing people together.

James Williamson shared a quote from Niccolo Machiavelli and would like to see a shift of power where citizens have input in decisions that are made and participate in the decisions that effect their lives.

Ilan Levy shared it is important for residents to have a clear understanding of the actual consequences of the form of government that the City will be using and voices of the people need to be heard in the final decisions that are made.

Anna Corning, Project Manager, introduced Elizabeth Corbo and Michael Ward from the Collins Center who gave an overview of their chart titled “Menu of Forms of Government with Example Options for Modifications” (Attachment A). After their presentation they made themselves available to Committee Members to respond to any questions or concerns.

Member Kai Long offered comments around strong Mayor and Manager and shared that the possibility of modifying and working on what government the City already has could be beneficial.

Member Mina Makarious noted that they agree with comments that were made by Kai Long and if the Committee decides to keep the City Manager he would like to see the Council and the public be more involved with the approach of hiring a new City Manager.

Member Nikolas Bowie shared he was in favor of switching to a strong Mayor system and realizing how much Massachusetts State Law puts into the budgetary process is a key factor that helped him lean towards a strong Mayor.

Member Lisa Peterson shared that she believes that the current system works very well but could use some improvement. Lisa Peterson noted that a directly elected Mayor is putting a lot of power to one person versus having a City Council that would require a vote of five people to make decisions within the City. Member Peterson shared that mutually agreeable goals are needed between the Council and Manager to make progress.

Member Jim Stockard offered comments and shared that the Charter Review Committee should not want to change the Charter just for the sake of change, but there are improvements in the current Charter the Committee can make moving forward. He shared that he likes the idea of keeping the current government system, noting that the City Manager is held accountable by the City Council. Jim Stockard also agreed with statements made by member Nikolas Bowie around the budget process and shared that the City Council should have more input and accountability with the budget.

Member Susan Shell shared that they agreed with comments made by member Jim Stockard. She shared that she is reluctant to change things radically without more time to deliberate and noted that maybe this is not the best time to go with a strong Mayor but feels most of the changes that will happen will be at the level of the City Council.

Member Jennifer Gilbert encouraged all members to speak on the topic of form of government if they feel comfortable. They shared that they are leaning towards a strong Mayor government and offered comments on why they are leaning that way, noting that it is hard to have a nonelected official be the voice of the City in regards to the budget and representing the City regionally.

Member Kevin Chen shared that they appreciate hearing comments from fellow Committee members and from listening to the conversation at the meeting, they are leaning towards strong Mayor only if there is a Chief Administrative and Finance Officer (CAFO) role partnered with a Mayor. Kevin Chen noted that having a Mayor will help bring accountability and transparency to the City, which is what many residents and Committee members have voiced in their concerns, and a CAFO will allow a manager type role that can help the City go in the right direction.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen shared that if the Committee decides to keep the current form of government one thing they would like to see changed would be towards the budget, and noted giving the responsibility of the budget to the elected officials is important.

Member Patrick Magee agrees with comments made around the budget process and shared it would be helpful to look at past budgets and compare them to municipalities that have a strong Mayor to see where Cambridge's budget stands in comparison to those to see if members are happy with that, or what the difference would be under different circumstances. He shared that there could be the possibility of strong Mayor form of government not being progressive enough and noted there is a balance of having a collective group deciding who the City Manager is could be a good safety net.

Member Kaleb Abebe shared he had similar thoughts to Patrick Magee to compare budgetary spending with other municipalities and how it relates to Cambridge. Kaleb Abebe offered comments around the budget and noted that more input from elected officials and the City

Council, is more of a high priority for him while also maintaining the Council-Manager relationship.

Member Jessica DeJesus Acevedo shared that she is apprehensive towards elected voting due to the lack of representation of minorities. She offered comments around the budget and the struggles of being a small business owner and resident in Cambridge, but noted she was in favor of a City Manager structure because she believes that role is more accountable. She shared suggestions around terms and noted that a four-year term would be more beneficial for the Council and the City to accomplish goals.

Member Max Clermont noted that he was in favor of a strong Manager and Council form of government and shared that there is more of a role that the Mayor could play as a member of the Council and with the City Manager.

The Chair, Kathleen Born shared that it has been very difficult to decide on the form of government and shared she is not ready to move away from a City Manager form of government. She agrees there could be changes made in the Charter and a more efficient way to elect a Mayor to Chair the City Council.

Member Kai Long shared that having nine elected leaders and helping them figure out how to work together would be extremely beneficial and a good goal for the Committee to work together towards.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen noted that the rise of costs in the City has played a role in how many people who identify as a minority vote in Cambridge and shared that the idea of having people who may not live in Cambridge, but work in Cambridge, vote as well, which could be a benefit regarding the increase of voter turnout.

Member Lisa Peterson had a clarifying question about how much input the Boston City Council recently got towards the budget and how they were able to make that change. Anna Corning noted that it was a ballot question that the State gave Boston to allow new power to the Council to allow them to amend, reject, or propose line items, as long as the overall budget number did not increase.

Member Nikolas Bowie stressed the importance that when the Committee goes to the State Legislature, they should approach the process from the perspective that the Charter is the vehicle to push through the legislature the changes the people of Cambridge want.

Member Susan Shell shared it is useful to think about the residents of Cambridge who will be here in twenty years, and noted that decisions made today may influence what the demographic of the city is in the future.

Anna Corning noted that at the next Charter Review Committee meeting she would like to finish the conversation and take a working consensus vote on the form of government.

The Chair, Kathleen Born extended the meeting by fifteen minutes, no vote was taken.

Member Jennifer Gilbert shared she looks forward to more conversation to help flush out and get a better consensus on form of government.

Member Mina Makarios offered comments regarding how the Committee will vote next week on the form of government.

Member Kai Long had a clarifying question on how the Charter can make the City Council and City Council- Manager relationship more accountable and if a Mayor-Council would be an easier relationship to build towards accountability. Anna Corning noted that with a Mayor system, they are less accountable to the City Council because they do not have to report to the City Council, whereas the City Manager does have to report to the City Council.

The Chair, Kathleen Born shared that she would like more information from the Collins Center regarding what a tight goal setting process would look like to tie goals to the budget. She also shared that understanding more about the State Legislative process and other Charters submitting Home Rule petitions would be helpful moving forward. Anna Corning and Elizabeth Corbo were available to respond and shared that there are many methods to use towards goal setting.

Member Kevin Chen had a clarifying question regarding the possibility of voters being able to appoint and remove a City Manager. Elizabeth Corbo provided answers, sharing that there is the possibility of having a form of a citizen free petition.

Member Jim Stockard shared it is important to communicate with State Representatives and Legislators sooner so they are on the same page and have an understanding of what the Committee is trying to address.

Member Mosammat Faria Afreen thanked the Collins Center for their chart and shared a table that represents the roles of the Manager and CAFO with a column on how they could be kept accountable by the Council and the voters would be helpful. Anna Corning shared that a CAFO role is person who is working for the Mayor and acts as a department head.

Anna Corning thanked everyone for participating and believes it was a very productive meeting.

The Charter Review Committee adjourned at approximately 8:00p.m.

Public Comment Online Form Submissions

3/26/2023

Lin Trever

1. KEEP CURRENT 2-year CITY COUNCIL TERMS (No to 4-year terms) 2. KEEP CITY MANAGER SYSTEM (Give our new City Manager enough time to prove himself). 3. CREATE A COMBINATION DISTRICT-BASED and CITY-WIDE-BASED COUNCIL - 6 district Councilors (2 from each of 3 Precinct-defined areas) plus 3 citywide Councilors. 4. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Keep the current Council-Elected mayor. Thanks!

4/7/2023

Justin Saif

I strongly oppose moving to ward system or a mix of wards and at-large members of Council. Cambridge residents perennially identify housing costs as the most important issue to them. The real goal of this committee should be to determine how we can have a responsive government that will do much more to address housing costs since it has remained the number one issue for a decade or more. A ward system would take Cambridge in exactly the wrong direction--recent studies show that a switch to ward elections leads to a reduction in housing production.

https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=up_policybriefs

In favor of a democratically elected chief executive for Cambridge

Maritza Soto <maritzasoto@gmail.com>

Tue 3/28/2023 5:26 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Thank you, Council Members,

I would like to express my belief that Cambridge needs a democratically elected chief executive and/or a mayor with more power. Although we elect our Council, it is the unelected City Manager who has total fiscal control. We need someone who will be accountable to the voters. How can we call ourselves a progressive city and not have the person who has ultimate say on all decisions be democratically elected? Direct accountability to the voters is fundamental for a healthy democracy. Having a "CEO" type who supposedly isn't distracted by "politics" is wholly unfair to the people of this city.

Our last Manager was an example of why our current system is fundamentally broken. He would often completely ignore policy orders advanced by the council, even ones that had advanced 9-0 with broad community consensus. That approach led to strained relations between the council and manager, and it also unnecessarily raised tensions throughout the community. In general, an elected executive would have to publicly own their decisions by choosing to veto items advanced by the council if they feel that is the right decision. The voters can respond accordingly. But the "pocket veto" option is too easy a choice for someone who does not have to respond to the voters. Additionally, the temperament of an individual shouldn't have so much impact on whether the Council's policy orders get implemented.

There's been a lot of talk in committee meetings about what real accountability means. Sometimes "community outreach" (e.g. public forums, events), which amounts to essentially a glorified suggestion box, is named as an accountability mechanism. But real accountability means giving voters the ability to directly elect the city's primary decision maker.

The process for determining commission recommendations on this issue has been rushed and done without much public input. Given that the commission is seeking an extension of their work until December 2023, it makes sense to keep this question open and seek more public input instead of making a final decision on 3/28/23.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours,

Maritza Soto
82 Fresh Pond Parkway
917-239-7633

Mayor versus City Manager

Ellen Mei <ellenwmei@gmail.com>

Tue 3/28/2023 5:28 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Hello Charter review committee,

I am a Cambridge resident at 383 Prospect St and I am submitting this public comment to advocate for the city to move towards a mayor-council system. While the current city manager is amenable to the council's demands and takes up policy orders that are set forth, that is not always the case. With the city manager model, and the lack of a strong review system and mechanism to replace an insubordinate city manager, the will of the people, as enacted through the democratically elected councilors, can be ignored. The lack of movement or enactment of municipal broadband is a prime example of the pitfalls of a city manager system. Though the city council had passed this policy order, it was ignored for years. The city council did not invoke their city manager review right and allowed the city manager to ignore their and the people's demands.

Moving to a mayoral system, where the executive can be changed when they do not regard the resident's demands, will make Cambridge residents feel that their voices are heard.

Thank you,
Ellen Mei

comments for your upcoming deliberations

Mary Jane Kornacki <amicusmjk@gmail.com>

Fri 4/7/2023 7:43 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>
Chairperson Born, committee members and staff -

I'm writing to share thoughts on the decisions you will be making regarding the head of the executive branch.

In all your deliberations, I urge you to keep front and center the GOAL you are working toward. At one meeting I attended, someone summed up the aim as "to have more transparent, inclusive government." Is that still your mission ...the "why" of this charter review effort? Reviewing what you hope to accomplish should be your first agenda item. Only after agreement on that does any discussion make sense. "If we do x ...will that help achieve our stated aim and what we believe our remit to be?" Everything needs to be decided in light of the consensus aim.

After 15 minutes listening to Mayor Michelle Wu on WBUR recently I turned towards a strong mayor form of government. She is exceptional in her personal qualities of leadership, persistence, communication, etc. BUT mostly I took away... "here is a natural-born leader in an important POSITION." That position is lacking here. We would benefit from having one publicly-elected person who embodies our aspirations and speaks to our challenges; who is visible in a crisis to stem fear and encourage hope.

The city council is too amorphous. The mayor voted in by the council is honorific...chairing meetings. I don't know anyone (among citizens, not employees) who considers Sumbul Siddiqui our leader.

The city would benefit from a form of government that - like Boston and Somerville - has a distinct and highly visible leader voted in by and accountable to the public.

Currently the city manager reports to the council. He or she is there as the administrator. Yi-An Huang appears to be competent. Some hesitate to move away from the status quo because they believe Mr. Huang should have time to prove himself. I urge you NOT to think in those terms, i.e., the real and potential qualities of an individual (after all a city manager may leave for a better position or not have his contract renewed). It is the POSITION that is under consideration. Please don't conflate the person with the role.

I urge you to consider how much could be gained in the cause of transparent, inclusive, accountable government by supporting a strong mayor as head of the executive branch. I for one believe it is the better alternative to the "mushy" and amorphous sort of leadership under our current system.

Thank you for your consideration.
Mary Jane Kornacki

Mary Jane Kornacki
103 Avon Hill St
Cambridge, MA 02140

Charter Review Public Comment

John P <mail@jpatrick.net>

Sun 4/9/2023 2:52 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Hello Charter Review Committee Members:

As a now 22 year resident of Cambridge and a previous resident of other municipalities with a strong mayor and strong city manager government, I've experienced both, and believe there are multiple benefits of an appointed strong city manager municipal government as opposed to an elected strong mayor system:

1. **Professional Expertise:** A city manager is typically a professional with experience in management best practices, while a strong mayor may not have the same level of expertise. They are appointed based on their qualifications and experience, and are typically better equipped to manage complex issues than an elected official. This means that a city manager is better equipped to handle the day-to-day operations of a city, as well as to provide appropriate guidance and recommendations to the city council.
2. **Apolitical consistency:** A city manager is a non-partisan professional who is less likely to be swayed by political considerations than an elected official. This can lead to more consistent and stable policies and practices over the long term, as the city manager is more clearly focused on the long-term interests of the city rather than short-term political considerations.
3. **Accountability:** A city manager remains accountable to the city council, which represents the interests of the citizens. The council can hire and fire the city manager if necessary, which provides a greater level of accountability than an elected mayor who may be less responsive to the needs and concerns of the citizens.
4. **Stability and continuity:** City managers often serve for longer periods than elected officials, which can provide stability and continuity in city administration. This can be particularly important when dealing with long-term issues and projects.
5. **Efficient decision-making:** With a city manager, decision-making is often faster and more efficient because there is a clear chain of command, and the manager can make decisions without having to navigate political rivalries or approval from a governing body.

Overall, a strong city manager system typically provides greater stability, efficiency, and professionalism, while a strong mayor system may be more susceptible to political pressures and less able to provide consistent and effective leadership over the long term.

Regarding the legislative branch issues, I would strongly favor keeping the city councilor term as it currently stands at 2 years; this is the branch of local government that should be most directly and frequently subject to the considerations of its citizenry.

I am also OK with the council electing the mayor, since they will hopefully elect someone who is likely to minimize unnecessary conflict and resultant inefficiency. In a city with the limited geographic size of Cambridge, I don't believe a ward-based system is necessary; the ranked choice election system in place should help make the council more representative to various constituencies.

Thank you for the work you are doing on our behalf!

John Patrick
950 Massachusetts Ave.

Oppose Wards

Dan Sprague <d.a.sprague@outlook.com>

Sun 4/9/2023 9:09 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Charter Review Committee,

I am a resident of North Cambridge and strongly oppose any ward based form of representation. A ward based system will fragment the city, for what benefit?

Thanks,

Dan Sprague
22 Cottage Park Ave, unit 8
Cambridge

Sent from my iPhone

councilor structure

Rachel Leicher <rachelleicher@gmail.com>

Sun 4/9/2023 10:13 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Hello,

I would like to voice my opinion on how councilors are selected for the City of Cambridge. It has been brought to my attention that there is talk of switching to a ward based system. I would like to oppose this switch as having councilors that represent all of Cambridge give us a more democratic system with less gerrymandering. Citizens of Cambridge do not just exist inside of their ward, but enjoy the entire city. Therefore, it makes more sense for any public benefits, to benefit all.

Best,

Rachel Leicher

165 Cambridge Park Drive.

Ward-based councilors is a bad idea

Eric Colburn <escolburn@gmail.com>

Sun 4/9/2023 10:28 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear Committee:

Our current system of city-wide ranked-choice voting for city council is working well and seems to me to be way, way more democratic than a ward-based system, which would be less competitive and less representative. Please don't switch!

Yours,

Eric Colburn

48 Cedar Street

Cambridge

Charter Review Concern

Michael Copacino <mhcopa@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 8:14 AM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

To the Charter Committee,

I was told by a member of the Cambridge Bikes group that there is some consideration to changing Cambridge's city government from an all at-large to a ward based system. Please keep the system as is. I greatly appreciate having 9 counselors who I can reach out to with problems and different people tend to have different specialties which make it easier for me to find multiple people to help on an issue. Furthermore as I experienced when I lived in Somerville, ward based positions are frequently uncontested while At-Large positions had competition every year.

Thank you for listening

Mike Copacino

Griswold St, Cambridge, MA

opposed to ward councillors

Jan Devereux <jan.devereux@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 11:55 AM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear Chair Born and Charter Review Committee Members,

As a former councillor and vice mayor, I urge you to maintain the existing electoral system of at-large representation and not to add ward councillors.

One of the challenges all councillors face is staying focused on the big picture goals for the city and region when some constituents (often their neighbors) demand they prioritize narrow neighborhood interests. There is a longstanding tendency among some Cantabrigians to define themselves by their neighborhood. Neighborhood identity politics already impedes policymaking on issues that transcend neighborhood boundaries like climate, transportation, and housing. Creating seats for ward councillors is likely to create even more division in the city and among councillors that stands to gridlock decision making on major citywide issues, while potentially introducing a spate of policy orders for changes that mostly benefit small groups of constituents. If the total number of council members increases to accommodate ward councillors, council meetings will be even longer if each member feels the need to speak on every issue before the body. Believe me, longer and more contentious meetings will not make running for council a more appealing proposition for more people.

The Cambridge election process is already confusing enough. It's hard enough to explain the mechanics and benefits of ranked choice voting to residents, without adding the element of explaining ward boundaries and who is running at-large or by ward. Voters who already feel overwhelmed with all the campaign flyers littering their stoops and requests for donations and yard signs would get even more appeals since each resident would have two votes to campaign for....every two years.

The guiding principle of the charter review committee should be "first do no harm." Adding ward councillors would do serious harm to civic unity, government operations, and forward-thinking policymaking.

Respectfully,

Jan Devereux
255 Lakeview Ave.

opposing wards

Matt Goldstein <goldsteinster@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 2:17 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear Charter Review Committee,

The last thing Cambridge needs in the face of a massive housing crisis is ward-based election of city council members. The city is a small enough political unit right now (perhaps too small) and letting NIMBYs on Brattle St. gain outsize power to prevent the city from building more housing is a terrible idea that will result in the continuing decline of our regions population and power (in favor of places like Texas, Arizona and Florida). Why on earth are we doing this?

Matt

Matt Goldstein
52 Clarendon Ave
415-215-2396

Keep the City Council At-Large

Amanda Sindel-Keswick <a.sindel.keswick@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 3:03 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear Charter Committee,

I urge you not to switch our election system to a ward-based one. The current at-large system allows citizens to vote for a slate of councilors who will work together for the benefit of our city. Furthermore, it enhances the competitiveness of the elections, making them more democratic. The current system is working for Cambridge, and there is no reason to change it.

Thank you,

Amanda

Cornelius Way, Cambridge

--

Amanda Sindel-Keswick (she/her)

J.D. Candidate 2024

Boston University School of Law

Mezzo-soprano

amandasindelkeswick.com

Support for strong mayor; opposition to ward/district councillors

David Sullivan <davidesullivan77@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 3:03 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear committee members,

Thank you for your service in this important effort.

As you may know from my interview with several committee members, I support a strong mayor -- elected by RCV for a four-year term. . If we want to change the status quo -- for example around housing policy -- I think it is essential to provide strong executive leadership with clear political and electoral support. My own experience in both city and state government convinces me of this. Especially given the constraints of the Open Meeting Law, the present structure makes it very difficult to organize significant policy change. (I am open to a professional chief operating officer appointed by and reporting to the mayor, but perhaps confirmed by the Council.)

I also strongly oppose moving away from PR citywide Council elections to any kind of ward- or district-based elections. That would increase parochialism, enable opposition to new housing, hurt tenant candidates who need to move often (as I once did as a Councillor), and disfranchise some voters who care about citywide issues than about their neighborhood. I agree with ABC's statement on this issue.

I am happy to discuss further with anyone. Thank you for your consideration!

David Sullivan
Former City Councillor

Input on Gov. Structure

Steven Miller <semiller48@gmail.com>

Mon 4/10/2023 4:27 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear Committee

I am writing in support of moving to a directly elected Mayor with executive power AND the continuation of the current city-wide election of Councillors using the current PR system.

My reasoning is that (1) we need to make the exercise of executive power more publicly accountable than the current City Manager system allows; (2) the current method of city-wide Council elections both ensure that most demographic and issue-related subgroups in the city have the ability to mobilize around a candidate who will give them voice at the same time that it forces candidates to take a city-wide perspective in order to aggregate enough votes to make the cut; (3) the PR system, for all its confusing details, means that nearly every voter ends up playing a role in the election of at least one and usually several people, thereby increasing voters' sense of connection and ability to speak to the Council; (4) and if there is a separately elected Mayor, the confusing nuances of the PR system become much less significant; (5) changing to a ward-based system would further balkanize Cambridge's already fractious politics with councillors stuck in narrow self-interest based on what usually turns out to be a very small group of very vocal neighbors.

Thanks for all the effort you are putting into this!

Sincerely,

Steven E. Miller
92 Henry St.
617-686-1050

[Movement Voter Project](#), volunteer

Book: [Advocacy Organizing: Smarter Strategies, Bigger Victories](#)

Topic: Legislative Branch (City Council Composition)

Question:

- *Should City Council be made up of all at-large members or include all or some district members?*
- *Should City Council term lengths change or remain 2 years?*
- *Should the current process for electing the mayor remain (councilors elect a mayor from among the members), or change to a direct election by voters?*
- *Should the number of councilors increase, decrease or remain (9 members)?*

Research Articles:

[2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey Report](#) (32% response rate, survey sent to 12,000+ municipal clerks)

[Model City Charter](#)

More Form of Government articles: [Folder Link](#)

Council Compensation from other Municipalities (selected cities with similar population to Cambridge, plus San Jose and a few MA municipalities)

[San Jose, CA](#) - Council Manager (recent charter review, pending attorney approval - mayoral election moved to presidential election years from gubernatorial).

- Council: 11 members, one of whom shall be the mayor. (new recommendations → 14 councilors)
 - 1 from each district, except the mayor who is elected at large
 - 4-year terms
 - Mayor - no more than 2 successive four-year terms

[Burlington, VT](#) (44,781 population) - Mayor-Council

- Council: 14 councilors, 2 from each Ward
 - Councilors serve 2-year staggered terms.

[Newton, MA](#) (population) - Mayor-Council

- Council: 24 members, 16 councilors elected at large, and 2 such councilors elected from each of the 8 wards of the city. The other 8 members are ward councilors who are nominated and elected by voters of the ward.
 - 2-year terms
- Mayor - 4-year terms

[Watertown, MA](#) (population) - Council-Manager

- 9 councilors, 4 at-large, 4 districts, Council president elected at large
 - 2-year terms

[Berkeley, CA](#) (117,145 population) - Council-Manager

- Council: 9 members, including 1 city-wide mayor
 - 1 from each district

- Mayor and Councilors serve 4-year term
- Elections even years

[West Palm Beach, FL](#) (117,145 population) - mayor-commission

- 5 city commissioners and a mayor elected at large
- Commissioners represent a district but are elected citywide
- 4-year term for mayor, the 2-year term for commissioner

[Billings, MT](#) (117,445 population) - Council-City Administrator (Manager)

- Legislative Branch: Council and Mayor
 - 10 councilors - 2 councilors from each ward, 1 from each ward elected every 2 years.
 - Serving 4-year terms
 - Mayor 4-year terms, limited to two consecutive terms elected at large

[Wilmington, NC](#) (117,643 population) - Council-Manager

- 7 city councilors elected at large, the mayor a member of the council
- Council - 4-year terms, staggered
- Mayor - directly elected, 2-year term

[Hartford, CT](#) (120,576 population) - Mayor-Council

- Council - 9 councilors elected at large, 4-year terms
- Mayor - 4 year terms

[Ann Arbor, MI](#) (121,536 population) - Council-Manager

- Council - mayor and 10 council members
- Mayor elected every 4 years on the gubernatorial election year
- Council: 2 from each of 5 wards, serve 4-year terms, half elected every two years

[Evansville, Indiana](#) (116,486 population) - Mayor-Council

- Council - 9 total: 6 districts and 3 at large
 - 4-year terms

Interview Feedback:

[Arthur Goldberg:](#)

Number of Councilors

- No real opinion, doesn't feel the number is super critical

Ward vs At-Large Councilors

- No real opinion - I know the general idea behind ward councilors - to represent specific parts of the city. I think with PR in Cambridge, actually does empower minorities in certain areas - tim toomey (east Cambridge) - if you have certain minimum votes under PR, in a way for a specific area to have a representative.

[Bob Healy:](#)

District vs At-Large Councilors

- PR works with Plan E, and I think the number of councilors is appropriate
- I don't think a district councilor would be beneficial for the city as a whole, focused too much on individual issues.

[David Sullivan:](#)

I like the City Council structure, don't think it needs to change. Representative of different points of view, ideologies, and areas of the city. The various points of view have been well represented across major issue areas like rent control, and affordable housing. I do not favor any form of district representation, I know it does work in some structures and without PR it's helpful in increasing representation. PR does a great job of accomplishing various forms of representation, you could vote for your neighborhood rep or vote based on a larger city-wide issue, but it is left up to the voters.

Henrietta Davis:

Running for Office / How do we get more inclusive in this system?

- It's very different now, than when she ran because they had a local newspaper and capacity for anyone to find out what was going on in the city for free or not a lot of money. With a lack of a local newspaper it can be difficult to figure out what is happening in the city.
- Concerned about how anyone can vote for anything, when all information needs to be sought out online.
- I think district councilors could help fill that void.
- Always a supporter of at-large PR, good for the city, and coalesced ideas that were important all around. But local representation like a district councilor, a point of connection. I'm not sure if at-large government works as well as it used to.
 - Example in Outer Cape - there is the providence town independent, you know everything that is going on in the outer cape. Why is a building like x, what's the housing policy, who is blocking it.
 - Maybe district government is a solution, could serve people better because someone is accountable in your neighborhood. - ex tim toomey (east cambridge)
 - A lot of councilors come from west campaign because maybe that's where there is \$\$

Term length / term limits

- I like the idea of running every two years for the state rep/senators, at least I get to see this person every two years, and have a concept of who they are.
- 4 years might be good / better if there were district councilors
- Definitely would need more research to figure out how it really works, who's voting, who's not voting, who feels like they know what's happening
- Look at the public, instead of the person running for the office - what makes for the best representation

Jeffery Young:

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler:

- District / At-Large
 - I did a lot of door-knocking and got 1500 renters to vote for me. If I was running to represent one district I don't know if I would have gotten elected
 - Difficult to have regional representation with the current system. Maybe if you had a mix of at large / district. Maybe multi-member districts - maybe like 3 elected RCV.
 - How lines are being drawn if there was a district councilor system.
- 2 years is short, and a lot of the second year is focused on running. Public financing could be helpful to alleviate the time spent campaigning

Louie DePasquale:

At-Large vs Ward Councilors

- I think the at-large council works. There are folks that represent certain areas like Tim Toomey - East Cambridge or Thomas Danehy - N. Cambridge. I think having city wide councilors is

important for them to be thinking about what is best for the whole of the city. But I'm not saying district councilors couldn't work, just the at-large perspective is important.

Rich Rossi:

Ward vs at large city councilors

- I think the city should be represented as a whole, anything that could be done that might make it more fair/equitable should be implemented. But I don't know what the actual solution is or have the information
- Consider how it would impact the current voting system
- Different neighborhoods vary in makeup and needs like north Cambridge vs Alewife. Should survey the public on this question.

Public Comment/ Community Group Feedback:

Tim Russell

Dear Charter Review Committee,

I am writing as a Cambridge resident and voter. I ask that the committee does not suggest revisions to the charter that remove our current system of ranked choice, at-large council members.

Before I moved to Cambridge, I had not experienced ranked choice voting. Now I believe it works well and provides several significant benefits.

Ranked Choice Voting gives you more say in who gets elected. Even if your top choice candidate does not win, you can still help choose who does.

More civility and less negative campaigning. Candidates who are not your top choice still need your support. This encourages candidates to appeal to a city-wide audience. Candidates know this and both work and campaign together. It is great to see and great for Cambridge. Such a breath of fresh air.

More diverse and representative candidates win elections. Cambridge has elected more women and more women of color. Our elected officials are more representative of our community.

More focus on city-wide solutions and not hyper local issues. I watch Somerville and how wards fight for resources instead of work together for the city and do not want that for Cambridge.

At-large council seats are more competitive than ward-based ones. In Somerville, 4 out of 7 of the ward councilors ran unopposed. I fear that my ward, North Cambridge, would become the fiefdom of one elected official and no longer have the attention of the other city council members.

Please do not suggest removing part of what makes Cambridge elections so vital, invigorating, and important. The Balkanization of our politics should not be the direction that Cambridge moves. It would be a step backward.

All the best,

Tim Russell, North Cambridge – 69 Harvey Street

Christopher Cassa

Dear Cambridge Charter Review Commission,

I am writing to express my appreciation for your review of the city charter and to offer my thoughts on a switch to a ward-based system.

A ward-based system would lead to less focus on city-wide solutions. For example, housing, school, and transportation policies are all examples of issues that impact the entire city and should be considered at the city level. For example, housing policies such as affordable housing and rent control affect residents across the city, not just in specific wards. Similarly, school policies such as funding for school renovations and new programming (e.g. pre-K) have a city-wide impact and should be considered at the city level. Transportation considerations naturally affect many people throughout the city and optimal solutions rely on participation from every ward.

Councilors should have a broad understanding of the benefits and impacts of these programs which affect the entire city, rather than being focused on the more narrow interests of a particular ward. Additionally, a ward-based system would likely lead to less democratic accountability and less political engagement. In our neighboring city, Somerville, 4 out of 7 of the ward councilors ran unopposed. This lack of competition would not force councilors to stay in touch with voters and be held accountable. This lack of competition also makes it harder for citizens to hold their elected officials accountable and decreases political engagement.

Another important point is that a ward-based system could lead to fewer renters being represented in the city council. As many renters move more frequently than owners, it would make it much harder for councilors who needed to move, particularly if they moved to a different ward, to continue to be elected. This would likely lead to a council that is less representative of the city's population as a whole. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,
Christopher Cassa

Itamar Turner-Trauring

Dear Charter Review Committee,

Since the idea of wards has come up, I would like to strongly urge you to not pursue that path, and stick to our current ranked choice election system. Here's why:

Wards discriminate against renters:

Renters who are city council members may lose their seat simply because they have to find a new apartment. We recently saw one council member, Councilor Azeem, have a really difficult time finding a new place to live; if he had been forced into a different ward, he'd be out of a job with a ward system. Ward councilors basically can't be renters and keep the job for long given Cambridge's tough rental market. Since renters are the majority of the city, setting up an election system that is heavily biased against candidates from those 60% of residents is extremely undemocratic.

Ward councilors are incentivized to pay less attention to renters. When I was a renter, I lived in 6 different apartments over 10 years, living in three different neighborhoods in Cambridge. Under the current system, a vote is a vote, regardless of where I live in Cambridge; from the councilors' perspective I wasn't that much different than a homeowner. With a ward system, however, my voice would have counted much less as a renter, because there'd be a decent chance I'd move into a new ward the next year. So however well-meaning councilors are, the electoral incentives push them towards paying more attention to homeowners who will stay in the same neighborhood for longer.

It's true the same effect applies to renters right now due to people moving across town boundaries, but it's a much weaker effect: I stayed in Cambridge the whole time, even as I kept moving. And insofar as it's a problem now, it'd be vastly worse with wards.

As someone who is now a homeowner, it's very clear the city cares a lot about property owners (consider our tax policy's focus on low taxes). And that's fine for me, but it's less good for the majority who are renters. A ward system would likely make policies even more imbalanced.

And, yes, you can have a few at-large councilors, but remember renters are the majority. A ward system that has a majority of council spots biased against the 60% of the population who are renters is bad, even if it's mitigated by at-large spots. Why have mitigation when we already have a better system?

Wards are worse at geographic representation than our current system

One argument for wards is that people want someone from their neighborhood to represent them. The problem is that ward boundaries don't necessarily correspond well to what people consider their neighborhood. They are by their nature arbitrary, and tied to equalizing population counts, not local problems or concerns.

With our current system, that's fine—a councilor who wants to represent some group of people in a specific geographic area can do so, and many of our councilors have core groups of support that are

geographic, as Councilor Toomey did for many years. It's possible to get geographic support from multiple areas, however: my impression is Councilor Toner got a lot of support in both North and East Cambridge. Councilors don't need to stick to arbitrary ward boundaries.

Minority groups only get ward representation if they live in the same area

On a variety of dimensions (Black residents, public housing residents, immigrants, students) there are groups that may want representation but are not the majority in any particular ward. Do you really want a system that prevents them from getting representation? And yes, you can solve this by having some at-large councilors... because at-large councilors are a better system (at least with our voting system).

Why switch to a system where only small of the seats are good at-large seats, and the rest are discriminatory in multiple dimensions?

Non-competitive races

If you get elected to the House or Senate in MA, you quite possibly have that job for as long as you want it, you're impossible to replace. In contrast, on the council we regularly have incumbent councilors lose their seats. This includes some that I supported, and some that I opposed—this isn't about my personal preferences. As a result, under our current system councilors are far more motivated to listen to constituents compared to state representatives, who know they merely have to be OK enough to keep getting re-elected.

Our current system: superior on all dimensions to ward-based systems

Contrast all the above problems with wards to our current system:

A ranked choice system doesn't waste votes like a majority-based system. When my #1 vote didn't make it in, that was sad but OK, my vote went to my #2 vote. You could do ranked choice for wards, which is better than nothing, but ward councilors often run unopposed, at which point ranked choice is irrelevant.

Councilors can shape unique coalitions, which can be geographical, ideological, demographic, or more commonly a combination of many factors.

Everyone's vote is worth pursuing, whether it's renters or homeowners (there are still biases towards homeowners, but much less so than wards).

Councilors need to keep constituents in mind, and can't just coast once they're elected.

It's not a perfect system, it still has flaws, it's still biased towards wealthier homeowners—but it's far superior to a ward-based system.

How might we improve it? Here are some ideas, premised on the idea that the main problem not the council election method (which is really pretty good) but other barriers elsewhere:

Remove money from election campaigns: city-funded campaigns might make for more equitable outcomes.

Switch elections to even-numbered years, so we get more voter engagement in local elections.

Allow non-citizens to vote.

Separate city voter registration from state/federal voter registration, so more people register for municipal elections even if they want to preserve their state/federal votes for places elsewhere that are less lop-sided.

Jameson Quinn

I support keeping at-large PR. But if we do have wards, I strongly suggest multi-seat wards (eg, 3 3-seat wards) and/or a hybrid (mixed-member) system that keeps some at-large seats. The presentation seemed to consider only single-seat wards as a possibility.

Ryan Houlette

Dear members of the committee,

I'm writing in support of the current Cambridge system for electing city councillors using

ranked-choice voting for at-large councillors. It promotes healthy competition for seats, as opposed to ward-based systems where candidates are more likely to have little or no competition in their ward. It also forces councillors to consider the needs of the city as a whole rather than the narrow needs of their ward. This discourages NIMBYism and allows the city to enact broader, longer-term policies for the overall good of the city that would never be prioritized at the ward level.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Ryan Houlette
11 Newman St

Robert Winters

It is worth noting that if a given constituency is spread over many wards, our PR elections enable those voters to essentially create their own "ward" that's not just based on geography.

Josiah Bonsey

Dear members of the charter commission,

I understand you are at the beginning of your work. Even still, I would like to express my deep objection to the idea of a ward-based election system in Cambridge. It is an idea that sounds nice as a theoretical alternative to our current system. In practice, the immediate effect of this change would be to greatly exacerbate political division between neighbors. I see no obvious benefits to our community's political discourse.

It would also create the possibility that nearly half of residents in any individual neighborhood would go without any representation whatsoever on the council. With our current system of #1 votes and transfers, this is virtually impossible. Our city is likely to become increasingly inequitable in the future, a ward-based system would increase the risk of concentrating power in the hands of wealthier residents who are able to afford the greatest investments of time and money toward their preferred political causes.

If there is evidence Somerville, Boston, and other cities that use ward-based systems have better functioning councils than we do, or achieve better outcomes for residents than we do, then I'd like to see it, because I am skeptical this is true.

Whatever the deficiencies of our current election system are, Cambridge is one of the rare cities that gives every resident an opportunity to actually be represented by a candidate who received their vote. It's one of our local traditions that I am most proud of, as a born-and-raised Cantabridgian. I believe it's a true example of our political system living up to our community values. (How rare this is in American politics!)

Our at-large election system is something the charter commission should protect. Whatever its annoyances, it aligns with principles of diversity and inclusion. A ward-based system, I fear, will never produce a genuine representation of this city's residents. I believe that what it would cost us would far outweigh its benefits to us; and that we would regret it.

Thanks very much, and good luck.

Josiah Bonsey

354 Broadway #1

Allan Sadun

Dear members of the Cambridge Charter Review Committee:

I was disappointed to read in the Cambridge Day that you are considering ward-based Councillors as a potential charter change. I believe this is a dead end and that there are many other changes much more deserving of your consideration.

The strength of our at-large proportional representation system is that it allows any community of interest to be represented if they are sufficiently motivated to vote together, no matter what that community's geographic distribution is. A district-based system could disenfranchise racial / linguistic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, seniors, affordable housing tenants, or any other voters who are most passionate about voting according to any non-geographic criterion.

A district-based system would also require periodic redistricting fights, which are nearly always game-able and fraught. Look no further than the recent sectarian fights in Boston's redistricting process to see just how thorny it gets when politicians are in the business of picking their voters and deciding for us which communities of interest matter or don't matter. Any possible redistricting scheme is likely to further one inequity or another - for instance, in New York City, their redistricting process is set to massively overrepresent Staten Island.

Multi-member districts are a political science best practice - they work excellently in Ireland, and there's a reason Portland, Oregon is voting on moving to a multi-member STV PR system in just a few days. Cambridge's own American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Fair Representation Act currently in Congress suggest that US House elections move to a multi-member district system (read more here).

The simple matter is that multi-winner elections allow for fair representation and single-member districts do not.

I'm not saying our election system is perfect. The biggest thing I think may be worth exploring is whether elections could be moved to even years, in order to increase turnout and participation. Low-turnout municipal-only elections produce strong inequities.

And this is a nit, but I have found it difficult to explain our pseudorandom surplus transfer rules, and even though they don't statistically matter, I've found they seem to increase voter discomfort. A fractional system would mean we get to use this cute MPR video to explain things instead.

And I recognize the difficulty in running for election citywide in a big city, and I recognize the confusion in not knowing who to contact about issues. I urge you to find other ways to ameliorate those issues. For instance, in Somerville, there is a City Hall Community Meetings program which helps increase accountability and transparency on neighborhood-specific issues. It doesn't require a charter change, but maybe it's something our City Manager should look into.

The big picture is: we should recognize the value in our at-large, PR, STV system, and seek to keep it.

Thank you,
Allan Sadun

237 Elm St #1

P.S. I have written this letter on behalf of myself and no other individual or organization.

Julia Renner
Hello,

I am a Cambridge resident at 197 Green St #4, and I am writing to express my opposition to switching to ward-based elections. My concerns include:

1. Ward-based elections are likely to lead to a focus on ward-level interests, rather than citywide interests.
2. Ward-based elections are less competitive, meaning less accountability and political engagement. Unlike ward-based and many state and national elections applicable to Cambridge, Cambridge City councilors must engage with and appeal to voters every election cycle, rather than running unopposed.
3. Arguing over ward boundaries, as has happened in Boston, distracts from democratic debate over policy and concerns relevant to our citizens.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and for your continued engagement with Cambridge residents.

Best regards,
Jules Renner
197 Green St #4

Gloria Korsman
Dear Charter Review committee members,

I understand the Charter Review committee is reviewing Cambridge's charter, the basic laws that structure how the city is governed, how elections happen, and so on. The Charter Review committee will make suggestions on what to change, potentially including Cambridge's election system.

A council that represents residents city-wide has enabled measures where every neighborhood contributes and benefits. My concern is that the Charter Review committee might propose that Cambridge switch to neighborhood-based elections, also known as "wards". Instead of having Council members represent the entire City ("at-large") as is the case now.

Here's why I think ward-based elections are a problem. Even if the council is a mixture of ward and at-large councilors, that still means most of the councilors will be elected, but we would risk creating a system that suffers from

Less focus on city-wide benefits

Ward-based councilors are more likely to focus on the narrow interests of a particular subset of their ward, which could come at the expense of city-wide programs. Short-term, local complaints could win out over broader support for long-term benefits that span many neighborhoods.

Less competitive, leading to less democratic accountability and less political engagement: In Somerville, 4 out of 7 of the ward councilors ran unopposed. In state and national elections in our area, most candidates ran unopposed. In Cambridge's current system, in contrast, councilors are up for a real fight every election cycle, which forces them to keep in touch with voters.

Ward boundaries are arbitrary, leading to fights over boundaries rather than policies: Gerrymandering is an issue across the US, as geographic boundaries are manipulated to get certain candidates elected. In neighboring Boston, the fight over ward boundaries became embarrassingly heated.

Councilors should not be elected based on arbitrary ward boundaries: they should be elected based on how well they represent a particular segment of the city's residents, geographical or otherwise. In a ward system, many more perspectives would go unrepresented, since geographic dispersion means they would not be able to win in any individual ward.

Thank you for considering my views.

Best wishes,
Gloria

Eric Colburn
Dear Committee Members:

I'm a longtime Cambridge resident (I lived most of my childhood on Alpine Street, went to college in Cambridge, now own a house on Cedar Street, and sent both of my children to CRLS), and I am writing to urge you to keep our city council elections city-wide rather than moving to a ward-based system. City-wide elections are more fair and more democratic, and they tend to discourage local corruption and manipulation of ward boundaries. I am very happy to be able to vote for councilors who represent me well even if they live in a different neighborhood. We all use the whole city; there is no good reason I can see to elect representatives from particular neighborhoods.

Thanks,
Eric Colburn
48 Cedar St.
Cambridge, MA

Kathleen Francis
Hello,

Thank you for the important work your committee is doing to review and update Cambridge's charter. As part of that work, I encourage the committee to maintain Cambridge's existing system of at-large councillors rather than switching to a ward-based system.

At-large councillors must be responsive to needs across the city of Cambridge, rather than fighting for the preferences of a narrow area. The problems that Cambridge faces right now -- housing shortages, improving non-car transportation options, etc -- require an approach that spans the whole city, so it's important to have city councillors who are responsible to stakeholders in all areas. In addition, our competitive, ranked-choice voting elections ensure that we elect the best people for the job.

Thank you for your work and for taking this into consideration,
Kathleen Francis
56 Hancock St, Cambridge, MA

Luis Mejias

Dear Charter Review Committee Members,

I applaud the Charter Review that is currently underway. Specifically, I appreciate the work to review what works and what doesn't work with our city's organizational structure.

I'd like the comment on the idea of ward- based councilor seats vs our current and more effective at-large council arrangement.

Nationally and even at the state level, our representative form of democratic government is dangerously on the precipice of falling apart. Gerrymandering and hyper-partisanship is making it next to impossible to work together to solve the big problems. At the local level, the ability to block necessary and effective change will mean nothing would get done. That's what would happen with a ward-based city, especially in a city without a mayor form of government.

In effect, our city would fail to be unified and instead be a series of tiny fiefdoms, with the real possibility of being divided into haves and have-nots. If Cambridge had a strong mayor form of government, with the mayor elected citywide, perhaps ward-based councilors would be worth discussing. Even then, a combination of at-large and ward-based would be the only option. But barring changing to a strong mayor form of government, ward-based should not be on the table at all.

Our city is small enough as it is, there is no need to further divide us and destroy our ability to tackle our shared problems, such as lack of housing and safe and efficient transportation.

Thank you,
Luis Mejias
18 Plymouth St

Walter Willett

Dear Committee members,

I understand that you will review our city charter, which is good to do periodically, and I appreciate your donation of time to this effort.

One issue to be considered is our election system and the alternative to make this ward-based. I would like to strongly support staying with our current system for many reasons, One important reason is that this helps to ensure that all groups have a voice at the table, and that the interests of our city as a whole take priority. This been important building a sense of community that helps make Cambridge a special place to live. Our City election is the only one that I consistently enjoy because our system encourages many committed people to run for office, and I can vote for those who I think are the best candidates rather the trying to hedge my bets on who would be most electable. Please, please don't push to change the special way we elect our representatives.

Walter Willett MD, DrPH
72 Chestnut St.

Cambridge, MA

Mike Copacino
To whom it may concern,

I was told by a member of the Cambridge Bikes group that there is some consideration to changing

Cambridge's city government from an all at-large to a ward based system. Please keep the system as is. I greatly appreciate having 9 counselors who I can reach out to with problems and different people tend to have different specialties which make it easier for me to find multiple people to help on an issue. Furthermore as I experienced when I lived in Somerville, ward based positions are frequently uncontested while At-Large positions had competition every year.

Thank you for listening
Mike Copacino

Benjamin Batorsky

Dear Charter Review Committee,

Hello, I'm emailing because I understand the Committee is considering proposing a new voting system for council members representing individual neighborhoods versus the city at large. I can't quite fathom why this is being considered. I think there's a lot of opportunity for the system to pit neighborhoods against each other and slow down the government's ability to get things done. I'll note the current system has yielded incredible results in terms of progress on infrastructure and responsiveness to resident concerns. I'd hate to see that progress slow down, and I can't quite understand what would suggest that changing a working strategy is a good idea. This seems like a massive restructuring and a step backward. Let's keep a good system in place and not experiment with dividing our community.

Thanks for all your work.

Thanks,
Ben

Joshua Hartshorne

Dear Charter Review Committee,

Nothing makes me prouder to live in Cambridge than the fact that we have proportional representation. Majoritarian rule is ... better than a dictatorship I suppose, but still a crappy system.

Proportional representation means that any coalition that constitutes 10% of voters can get a seat at the table. Coalitions can be regional, without any fighting over ward boundaries. They can be based on issues. They can be based on race or class. They can be based on horoscope or favorite color. It's up to the voters to decide! And that's awesome.

In majoritarian rule, 51% of the voters get 100% of the seats at the table. That's democratic, but let's agree that it's not very democratic.

Please don't do away with proportional rule.

(I feel less strongly about wards, but if you are going to have proportional representation with wards, we'll need a city council with 5+ members for each ward, so probably 50 overall. That seems pretty unwieldy. And you have to fight over ward boundaries. Which is just extra, unnecessary fighting, when you could just have proportional representation at the city level.)

Josh Hartshorne

114 Inman

Becky Sarah

City Councilors should work together for the whole city. There's nothing good to come of pitting the various wards and neighborhoods against each other.

Please keep the current system.

Becky Sarah

14 Whittier St

Guillaume Bouchard

Hi,

Please do not take a step back in Cambridge's democracy. Stick to our current system of elections using ranked choice, at-large council members. No ward-based nonsense. One person, one vote.

Guillaume Bouchard

Riverside resident

James Mahoney

Dear Committee,

As you know (and probably the rest of the universe does, too), Cambridge has a very vocal, highly visible, very progressive cohort, which is well-represented on the City Council. But despite their thinking so, that cohort does not represent the entire spectrum of city residents, and may not actually even represent the majority of the citizenry beyond the core that votes in city elections.

Many of the progressive policies and ideas are laudable, but the vigorous pursuit of them is very often not clearly thought-through. The result is that unintended consequences seem to frequently crop up as these policies are implemented. It is also not unusual for proponents to dismiss or disregard known downsides of some substantial initiatives because of their view that the ends justify any means.

Separately, but related, the two-year term for Councilors means that the Council make-up changes frequently. So though there is relative consistency over multiple terms, single-issue groups are able to disproportionately influence and staff the Council.

For these reasons, and because the Manager typically serves over many election cycles, I believe we need a pragmatic, middle-of-the-road Manager who can keep her/his eye on the overall picture and trends, and can temper some of the more aggressive initiatives while advancing City and Council objectives. To put it another way, we need the Manager to be a voice of reason, balancing desires and goals with practical realities and the overall health of the city.

I believe that the City has been fortunate in this regard over at least the past four City Managers, and with the current Manager.

For these reasons, I strongly believe that the current balance between the Council and the Manager is best for the City, and should be retained in the revised Charter that you are working on.

Additionally, I think the two-year Councillor term also benefits the City in that the voters have regular opportunity to register their support or lack of it for members of the Council. While reasonable arguments can be made for four-year terms, including staggered incumbencies, that is a long time for the City to endure special-interest packing of the Council, or ineffectual members.

Thank you for your consideration, and also for the work you are doing on the Charter review.

James Mahoney
234A Walden Street
02140

Itamar Turner-Trauring
Dear Charter Review Committee members,

Boston's redistricting process continues to show how broken ward-based councilors are, and how much better Cambridge's current system is.

As a Cambridge resident, I do not really know what ward I'm in. If it changes, that's fine, the election commission will tell me—and it still won't make any difference to who I can vote for. And it won't make any difference to the results of the election.

Meanwhile, in Boston, we have a city councilor, Frank Baker, who worries he is going to lose the next election because some ward lines were redrawn on the map. So now he's bankrolling a lawsuit: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/03/23/metro/boston-city-councilor-frustrated-with-redistricting-is-bankrolling-litigation-against-it/>. This quote gives the gist of the issue, and explains very well why ward-based councilor elections are such a bad idea:

Supporters said the map would strengthen political opportunities for people of color in a city long run by white voters and white elected officials. But critics objected to the domino effects those efforts had in other parts of the city. The new map, for example, splits between two council districts the Anne Lynch Homes at Old Colony, a Southie housing development named after US Representative Stephen Lynch's mother — a move critics argue could muffle the political voice of its residents.

And the map carved up Baker's current constituents, severing a cluster of majority-white, high-turnout precincts in the southern tip of Dorchester that he argued was the "core" of his district.

"That's the most glaring thing," Baker said recently. "Everyone is talking about the core of their district. Adams Corner is my core and they split it right up the middle."

The argument for redistricting makes sense—but the fact this redistricting was needed at all is a symptom of a broken election system. Hopefully representation for people of color improves going forward, but it clearly was a problem for many years—because of ward-based councilor elections. Under Cambridge's system this wouldn't have been an issue. Plus, it's quite possible that the Boston redistricting will both improve the situation and disenfranchise some people at the same time, because given a fundamentally broken system there's only so much you can fix by redrawing lines.

Any demographic change can result in the ward districts making less sense, they're only redrawn rarely, and it clearly can be a contentious process where personal ambitions and fair representation can be very hard to disentangle. Is this the sort of political fight you want Cambridge to have in the future?

Representation shouldn't be based on where arbitrary lines are drawn on a map. This is no way to run a political system, and no way to elect people. Fair and equal representation should be a built-in property of the election system, and ward-based councilors fail that minimal requirement.

--

Itamar Turner-Trauring"

Mark Kon

Dear Committee Members,

I would like to add my voice strongly to support the position of the Cambridge Citizens Coalition on the current rethinking of the government structure in Cambridge. I want to say that decisions often have many unanticipated consequences, and should be made with the highest gravity. With this among other reasons in mind, we support the following measures:

1. Keeping the current 2 year terms for City Council. We want to keep the Council responsive and accountable to the Citizens of Cambridge - given the current votes on radical changes to permanently change Cambridge, there needs to be a year-to-year level of accountability for votes taken within the City Council.
2. Keep the City Manager System. This system should only be changed if there are serious deficiencies exposed.
3. Create a more diverse Combination District with a City-Wide-Based council: two Councilors from each of the 3 precinct-defined areas, and three Councilors chosen city-wide.
4. Maintain a council-elected mayor for the present, to be changed only if there are any deficiencies exposed.

Please feel free to get in touch with me (by email or at the phone number below) if you would like to go over any of these issues with me. Thank you very much -

Mark Kon

Shelagh Hadley

Please keep current 2 yr. City Council terms, NOT 4 yr. terms which would be far too long. We citizens need to maintain accountability from our elected council.

Please keep the current City Manager system, to allow our new C.M. time to prove himself.

Please create a new combination of district-based and city-wide-based council – 6 district councilors (2 from each of 3 Precinct-defined areas) and 3 citywide Councilors. The current system results in some areas (such as my own) being woefully under-represented, and seems unfair. We all need adequate representation!

Please retain the current Governance structure, with the council electing its own mayor.

Thanks for all your work!

Shelagh Hadley, longtime Cambridge resident owner and taxpayer

John Trever

Dear Committee Members,

I favor the following charter revisions.

KEEP CURRENT 2-year CITY COUNCIL TERMS (No to 4-year terms).
KEEP CITY MANAGER SYSTEM (Give our new City Manager enough time to prove himself).
CREATE A COMBINATION DISTRICT-BASED and CITY-WIDE-BASED COUNCIL - 6 district
Councillors (2 from each of 3 Precinct-defined areas) plus 3 citywide Councillors.
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Keep the current Council-Elected mayor

Kind regards,
John Trever
156 Richdale Ave, Cambridge, MA 02140"

Phyllis Simpkins

I am writing to express my support for the following:

- continuing 2 year city council terms; this is enough time for residents to evaluate their effectiveness
- continuing the city manager system to ensure a system of checks and balances
- continuing the council elected mayor system

With a relatively new city manager, the city should allow him time to do the job for which he was hired, rather than the urgency to "change the rules." I look forward to following this committee's process moving forward. Thank you.

Phyllis Simpkins
249 Huron avenue

Hope Turner
Hello,

My name is Hope Turner, and I'm a Cambridge resident. I will not be able to attend the Carter Review Committee Meeting on 3/28/23, but I would like my comments below to be included in the meeting please.

I strongly believe that the city manager should be elected by the people of Cambridge. Direct accountability to voters is vital for a healthy democracy. I don't believe we can call ourselves a progressive city until we democratically elect the person who ultimately makes the decisions. Although our current City Manager has been more responsive to the City Council, this may not be true for the next City Manager. Residents deserve protection against abuses of power that inevitably happen in a government that does not directly elect its chief executive.

Thank you,
Hope

Robert Camacho

To: Cambridge City Council, City Manager, City Clerk
Re: Cambridge Council and Governance Changes

I urge the City Council to retain the current 2-year City Council term and to reject the proposed 4-year term for the Council. It is my opinion that too many members of this Council are already far too unresponsive to current citizens and residents and a change from a 2-year term to a 4-year term will

make this unacceptable situation even worse.

I also urge the City Council to retain the current City Manager system because we finally have an outsider City Manager not beholden to the same decades-old system and outdated considerations that has strangled City Government for far too many years. It is not surprising that some current members of the Council want to change their approach to keep matters out of balance.

Also, now that we have a new City Manager, I support keeping the current Council-Elected mayor, to keep the current system as is.

Believe me, no one is more surprised than I am that I now think the current structure of government in Cambridge might actually begin to work for residents and citizens.

Robert Camacho, 24 Corporal Burns Rd., Cambridge, MA 02138"

Suzanne Preston Blier

Dear Ms. Born and Members of the Charter Review Committee,

Thank you for the great work that you are undertaking and the thought with which you are addressing these important issues. I have attended when I can.

Today's meeting seeks to have a working consensus on the question: Should the head of the executive branch be an elected official (strong mayor) or remain an appointed position by the city council (city manager)?

I work with a group of civic-minded volunteers across the city. We have spent some time studying this and other issues. I support the views of our group for:

Keeping the current City Manager system for the present (Giving our new City Manager enough time to prove himself). RATIONALES:

We are making already a number of changes with the city manager system that should be allowed to play out for a few years at last.

We should give our new manager a chance to show what he can do in meeting the new Council goals and demands.

If at some point we do move to a strong Mayor system (an elected Mayor), we would need to prepare the way and likely set up a system like Boston where the mayor could not also run for Council.

We feel that the City Manager system offers more checks and balances.

1. This allows key oversight on financing and achieving Council policy changes.
2. This helps limit political intervention in the functioning of the city.

Most of us support keeping the current Council-Elected mayor. OTHER VIEWS:

A minority of us (myself included) favor an elected mayor within the city-manager structure.

Those of us who would like to have the voters elect our mayor within the current city manager system would like the elected mayor to set the term's agenda both with Council and with the city manager. One concern raised with this approach is that it might promote conflict between the mayor and the city manager, but if both agree on the goals for the term at the outset for that term, my view is that this is unlikely to be a problem.

Another minority supports a Strong Mayor system (without an appointed City Manager) to make the

mayor more accountable to the voters.

Important Note: Any mayor vote should be a separate vote from the Councillor vote (but on the same ballot), thereby allowing voters to select their #1 (and other choice) candidates independently, but also be able to vote separately for mayor, through the current proportional voting system, keeping the same number of 9 Councillors (including the mayor). The reason is that voters here often base their choice of #1 vote on the person they most feel needs their votes to get elected. The choice of mayor is different, and each councillor who seeks to also run as mayor, should be encouraged to set out their proposed agenda and goals for the term, allowing voters to compare them.

Cordially,
Suzanne Preston Blier
5 Fuller Place

Marilee Meyer

"While ideally I would like to vote for a mayor, given the atmosphere of the current council, I feel we need checks and balances which could be ignored with a direct vote. A mayor being chosen from the 7 councilors lessens the chance of council manipulation at large. We can already anticipate the campaigning for Mayor and the potential agenda supported by special interest groups. If those lobbyists also gain a 4-year term in their preferred candidate, we will be facing a stacked court and Cambridge as a whole municipality loses. It will be hard to bounce back from ideology dominating practical, feasible and sustainable decisions for EVERYONE. We have a hard time with that now. Please maintain the current system.

thank you for your hard work on this. I hope you get your extension for something this fundamental.

Marilee Meyer
10 Dana St
02138
mbm0044@aol.com "

Tom Lindsley

I would like to keep the current system of 2 yr terms for members and council members electing mayor

Marilee Meyer

In an ideal world, it would be nice to have the mayor to be elected directly by the people. But, if a qualified councilor candidate decides to run for mayor, will they also be able to run for council if unelected mayor? Or if not, then the citizens would be deprived of a good candidate.