

Gardner Charter Review Committee Final Recommendation Summary

March 2014

The Gardner Charter Review Committee's mission is to recommend a charter for the City that provides a local government that is transparent, effective, efficient, and responsive, both for the present day and for future generations.

City Council

The current 11 member city councils; 6 elected at-large and 5 elected by ward would not change. The council would continue to appoint a city clerk but would no longer appoint the auditor or the treasure/collector; those positions would be appointed by the mayor. All department heads appointed by the mayor would be subject to confirmation by the city council. The city council would retain the powers of municipal legislative bodies in Massachusetts.

Mayor

The mayor would continue to be the chief executive officer of the city, responsible for its day-to-day operations. The mayor would appoint department heads and members of boards and commissions, subject to city council confirmation. The mayor would serve a 4-year term, rather than the current 2-year term.

School Committee

The school committee would become a 7-member body elected at-large; the mayor would continue to serve as the 7th member and would continue to be the chair.

Organization of City Operations

The mayor would be authorized to submit reorganization plans of city departments and boards and commissions to the city council. The city council could approve or reject the mayor's proposals but would not have the authority to amend them.

Finances

The mayor would be required to call a joint meeting of the city council and the school committee to review the fiscal condition of the city before the start of each year's budget process. The budget process would become more open and transparent, and would require a public hearing. The mayor would be required to prepare five-year financial projections and capital improvement programs. An annual audit would be conducted by an independent public accountant selected and overseen by the city council.

Prohibitions

Members of the city council or school committee would not be allowed to hold any other compensated municipal position. No former member of the city council or school committee can hold any compensated appointed municipal position until 1 year after their service ends. Any elected official finally convicted of a felony would immediately be removed from office.

Elections

Elections would take place in September and November in each odd-numbered year as they are now.

Voter Participation Provisions

There would be provisions for voters to directly participate in the decisions of city government. There would be a provision to allow voters; to initiate a referendum to allow voters to reverse measures adopted by the city council or school committee; and to initiate petitions to compel the city council or school committee to adopt measures. There would be a recall procedure for all elected officials. There would be safeguards against frivolous petitions.

Charter and Ordinance Review

The City would be required to review its charter every ten years and codify its ordinances every five years.

Timeline

The recommendations will be filed with the city council and the mayor in March. The city council will deliberate and submit a home rule petition to the mayor for approval. The state legislature will then take action on the petition. If the petition is approved, it will appear on the ballot at the state election in November 2014.

