

**Town of Ridgefield
2023 Charter Revision Commission**

Final Report to the Board of Selectmen

August 12, 2023

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This final report of the 2023 Ridgefield Charter Revision Commission presents its recommendations for Charter amendments to the Board of Selectmen (BOS). This report is comprised of several distinct documents:

1. Overview

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2. Summary of Proposed Revisions

This summary includes descriptions of the proposed revisions, names of those who offered the proposals, affected Charter sections, and the vote on each proposal by the Commission. It also refers to the Commission's "change request tracker" (Tracker), which provides more detail and is located on the Commission's page of the Town's website (ridgefieldct.org/charter-revision-commission).

3. Updated Charter

- **Black-line version:** This is how the revised Charter would read if all the proposed revisions in this final report were adopted by the voters.
- **Red-line version (AVAILABLE ONLINE ONLY):** This is the current Charter edited to show proposed revisions. New wording is shown underlined in RED, deleted wording is displayed with a ~~strikethrough in PINK~~, and wording that is pre-existing but has been moved within the document is shown with double underline in BLUE. *Please note: Many of the sections in Article XI, Standards of Conduct, have been reordered. These appear in their current positions but with updated section numbers.*

4. Listing of Declined/Withdrawn Suggestions

This detailed listing shows suggestions that the Commission declined to recommend, along with a summary of the Commission's discussion and final vote on those suggestions.

OVERVIEW

Charter Revision Process

Since its appointment in January, the Charter Revision Commission received 128 Charter revision suggestions from residents, the Board of Selectmen, and various Town boards. The Commission carefully considered each suggestion, which often involved research and discussion over several weeks. Ultimately, the Commission decided to recommend 58 of those suggestions for consideration by the Board of Selectmen; to decline 60 suggestions, most often because the suggestions were not Charter issues; and in two cases, to refer an issue back to the Board of Selectman for consideration and action. Ten suggestions were withdrawn.

In May, the Commission presented a draft report of its recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. Following a public hearing and its own deliberations, the Board of Selectmen returned comments and suggestions to the Commission in July, and the Commission and the BOS then held a joint meeting to discuss the BOS suggestions.

Following further discussion and review, the Commission accepted almost all of the suggestions of the BOS, and incorporated them into this final report. There are two items of note:

- **Proposed Information Technology Commission:** The Commission agreed with the BOS suggestion that starting a technology advisory group as a BOS-appointed committee, rather than defining it in the Charter, would give the group more flexibility as it develops its mandate and mission. So, in this report, the Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen appoints an information technology committee.
- **Gender Neutral Language:** The Board of Selectmen suggested different titles for “Board of Selectmen” and “First Selectman” than those the Commission originally recommended. With the goal of gender neutrality in mind, the Commission disagreed with the BOS suggestion and has recommended alternative wording in this final report.

In August, the Commission adopted this final report of Charter revision recommendations, and then submitted it to the Board of Selectmen for a final decision on which proposals they will send to voters in November.

About the Proposed Revisions

The proposed Charter revisions are grouped into four broad categories:

1. **Board Composition:** These updates relate to the make-up and/or term of service of several existing boards.
2. **Governance:** These revisions relate to the managing components of Town government, such as changing three positions from “elected” to “hired as town employees,” and using gender-neutral terms, which includes changing “Board of Selectmen” and “First Selectman” to “Board of Selectpersons” and “First Selectperson.”
3. **Procedural:** These revisions amend operational rules, such as clarifying the rules on vacated positions, and strengthening the ethics standards that apply to officials and board members.
4. **Technical:** These include a variety of revisions such as updates to statutory references and clarifications of wording.

Other Recommendations for the Board of Selectmen to Consider

In response to requests and concerns by both residents and members of the Board of Selectmen, the Commission recommends that Board of Selectmen create two new advisory committees:

- **Information Technology Advisory Committee:** to provide advice and guidance on Town information technology matters, such as internet access, IT hardware, cyber security practices, data storage, and outsourced IT professionals. Once the committee is established and running smoothly with the Town’s IT professionals, it could be considered for inclusion in a future Charter revision.
- **Form of Government Advisory Committee:** The Board of Selectmen suggested that the Commission explore whether the Town would be better served with a Town Administrator or Town Manager. Additionally, a few residents questioned whether the Town Meeting is still the most effective form of government for Ridgefielders.

The Commission believes these are important questions, but it did not have adequate time to give the questions due consideration given their magnitude. Therefore, the Commission is recommending that the Board of Selectmen appoint an advisory committee to research whether alternatives or enhancements to the current Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government would better serve the current and future needs of residents.

Next Steps

The Charter revision process and timeline are set by state law:

- **Board of Selectmen Vote:** The Board of Selectmen will next vote to approve or decline all or parts of this final report.
- **Voters Decide in November:** The recommendations accepted by the Board of Selectmen will go to the Town's voters for approval as part of this November's general election. Some of the proposed revisions (such as the technical changes) are likely to be grouped into one question on the ballot, while others will be presented as separate questions.

For More Information

Minutes from and recordings of each Commission meeting are available on the Town website. Minutes are posted on the Charter Revision Commission page; recordings are posted on the Board of Selectmen page. The Commission has given digital copies of all its records to the Town for archiving.

A Note of Thanks

The quadrennial Charter revision process offers residents the important opportunity to share their ideas for refinements in how our Town government works. Commission members are deeply grateful to all residents who shared their ideas at public hearings, Commission meetings, or through correspondence; to board and committee members as well as Town officials who reviewed the pertinent sections of the Charter and offered their thoughts for updates on processes and clarifications of wording; and to committee chairs and Town officials who attended meetings to answer Commission questions and provide relevant background.

2023 Charter Revision Commission Members

Rebecca Mucchetti, Co-Chair
Bob Cascella, Co-Chair
Tom Lansen, Vice Chair
Kimberly Welton, Co-Recording Secretary
Michael Lordi, Co-Recording Secretary
Laurie Christiansen
Mike Rettger
Derick Schirm
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