LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OFFERS EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The League of Women Voters of Amherst, following several months of study and meetings on local government in 2003, adopted its current position on the concepts, principles, and practices that make for effective local government.

Using these criteria in the order of importance provided by League members we have provided on merits and differences between the proposed Charter and our current form of government to enable citizens to evaluate the Charter.

This is not an exhaustive list, but an attempt to look at both forms of government. The League has NOT taken a position on the Charter but encourages each voter to read the Charter carefully and to cast an informed vote on March 27.

LWV POSITION STATEMENT APPLIED TO CURRENT TOWN GOVT’ & PROPOSED CHARTER

The Amherst League of Women Voters supports the following concepts, principles, and practices that make for effective local government. We believe local government should maximize:

A. Widespread and inclusive participation

1. Hearing of diverse points of view encourages involvement.
   Town Meeting of 240 elected and 14 ex-officio members. Select Board of 5. 13 Town Council Members

2. Being part of the process creates understanding and acceptance of decisions.
   Currently, over 35 town committees provide opportunities for over 250 citizens to participate.Town Council will determine its own standing or ad hoc committees. At least some of the current committees, such as the Select Board and law or town bylaws.

B. Diversity of the community reflected in government

1. Accessibility fosters commitment, vitality, and fairness.
   Town meeting members are elected from at least 10 precincts. 10 registered voters may submit Warrant Articles that must be acted upon at Annual Town Meeting. 150 signatures are needed for Special Town Meeting. Town Council has 10 members elected from five districts and three at-large. Proposals for Town Meeting approval. Open discussion at Town Meeting (held at least twice a year) prior to rejection or approval of policy recommendations. Petition processes make possible rejection of a Council decision or public hearing on proposals for Town Meeting approval.

2. Openness early in the decision process allows citizens to be part of the process.
   Sessions of Town Meeting, Select Board, Finance Committee and Planning Board are televised. Many Town Meeting votes are taken electronically and recorded. Citizens may attend meetings.
   Minutes of Town Council and other meetings may be televised. Town Council meetings include a record of each member’s votes. If requested, any board or committee may take record vote. Any member may attend meetings.

3. Agenda and decisions should be published in a timely fashion.
   Select Board meeting agenda is posted 48 hours before meeting. Warrant Articles for Town Meeting available more than a month prior to meeting. Select Board meeting agenda is posted 48 hours before meeting. Warrant Articles for Town Meeting available more than a month prior to meeting.
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4. Citizens have a right to expect full disclosure of the facts pertinent to the decision process.
   Citizens have the opportunity to speak during Town Meeting and at other meetings. Minutes and records are maintained by the Select Board and other town committees.
   Town Council shall provide agendas at least 48 hours before meetings.

C. Openness and full disclosure: Adherence to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law must be maintained.

1. Shared responsibility among the various branches of government creates balance.
   Select Board is responsible for the general governance of the town; makes legislation, approves appropriations and appropriates funds (the warrant). Town Meeting passes legislation, which is implemented by Select Board and other town committees. Town Manager is the chief administrative and legal officer of the town. School Committee and Library Trustees, independently elected, are responsible for the general governance of Schools and Libraries, respectively.
   All powers of the Town are vested in the Town Council. Town Council exercises the legislative, executive and administrative functions of the Town. The Town Manager and/or the Finance Committee, a committee of the Council, is responsible for the financial management of the Town. The Finance Committee, a committee of the Council, is responsible for the financial management of the Town. The Finance Committee, a committee of the Council, is responsible for the financial management of the Town.

2. All appointments should be made on a merit basis and serve at the pleasure of the Council.
   Select Board appoints Town Manager, Zoning Board of Appeals, Personnel Board, Election officers and other town committees. Town Manager appoints Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission and the Library Trustees. Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission and the Library Trustees are subject to approval of the Council. Town Manager appoints members of the Finance Committee, a committee of the Council.
   Town Council appoints Town Manager. Town Council appoints Planning Board, Library Trustees, School Committees, Historical Commission and other Boards and Committees. Town Manager exclusively appoints department heads and other employees. Select Board appoints Town Manager.

3. Agenda positions on the initiatives of the respective branches of government.
   Select Board positions on the initiatives of the respective branches of government.

4. Warrant articles should be too easy or too difficult to pass.
   Process requires signatures of 5% of the voters within 7 days after the dissolution of Town Meeting on the passage or rejection of any measure under consideration.
   Petition processes make possible rejection of a Council decision or public hearing on proposals for Town Meeting approval.

5. Honesty and non-corruptibility in all decision making

A. Access to decision makers should be open to all.
   Any resident may attend Town Meeting. Select Board and other committee meetings, or access members by email, mail or phone.

B. Town officials and appointees should be susceptible to sue for unethical conduct to special interests.
   State ethics and conflict of interest laws, and state campaign and political finance laws apply to all elected and appointed officials. State law exempts legislative bodies, such as Town Meeting, School Committees, Library Trustees. School Committees and Library Trustees are responsible for the general governance of Schools and Libraries.

C. Efficiency based on professional management and timely decision making

1. Efficiency is the delivery of essential services.
   Town Manager, appointed and supervised by the Select Board, is the chief administrator and fiscal officer of all town agencies except Schools and Libraries.
   Town Manager, appointed by and responsible to the Town Council, is the chief administrator and fiscal manager of all town agencies except Schools and Libraries.

2. In the policy-making process, efficiency is not as important as open public deliberation and citizen participation.
   Select Board meeting agenda is posted at least 48 hours before meeting. Petition processes make possible rejection of a Council decision or public hearing on proposals for Town Meeting approval.
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3. All information brought up by citizen petitions and requests, should be acted upon in a timely manner so that the decision will be meaningful.
   Any resident may ask the Town Manager to provide information from Town Manager, Superintendent of Schools, Library Director, and are discussed at open meetings of the Select Board, School Committee, Library Trustees and Finance Committee. Budgets are ratified at Town Meeting.
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4. Accountability for budget and appropriation items should be disclosed during deliberations.
   All town committees and boards involved in bringing warrant articles forward explain their rationale: Town Meeting members have the opportunity to explain the rationale of any proposed fiscal decisions. Town Meeting members have the opportunity to explain the rationale of any proposed fiscal decisions.
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