

## LEAGUE OFFERS EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The League of Women Voters of Amherst, following several months of study and meetings on local government, adopted a consensus 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 similarities 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 April 1.**

### LWV POSITION STATEMENT APPLIED TO CHARTER & CURRENT TOWN GOV'T

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:

<b>A. Widespread and inclusive participation</b>		
Consensus Statement	Currently	Proposed Charter
<i>1. Hearing of diverse points of view encourages involvement.</i>	Town Meeting more than 240 voices.	9 Council Members plus Mayor.
<i>2. Being part of the process creates understanding and ownership of decisions.</i>	Over 300 citizens serve on numerous town committees.	Committees may continue subject to Council decision.
<i>3. Expression of various opinions promotes a sense of inclusion.</i>	Any resident of Amherst can speak during Town Meeting.	Public forums to be held at least twice a year and on petition of 300 voters. Council rules will determine process for public input at meetings.
<b>B. Diversity of the community reflected in government</b>		
Consensus Statement	Currently	Proposed Charter
<i>1. Accessibility fosters commitment, vitality, and fairness.</i>	10 registered voters may submit Warrant Articles that must be acted upon at Annual Town Meeting, 100 signatures are needed for Special Town Meeting	One voter may submit a petition, but it need not be heard or acted upon. Petition by 50 voters requires Council action within 90 days. Rules for Public input during Council meetings still to be formulated
<i>2. Diversity of opinion is more important than striving for demographic quotas.</i>	Large numbers of citizens participating in committees and Town Meeting assure diverse opinions.	Diversity of opinion will depend on the number of committees that will continue and the diversity represented in the Council and Mayor.
<b>C. Openness and full disclosure</b>		
Consensus Statement	Currently	Proposed Charter
<i>1. Citizens have a right to expect an open process in local government.</i>	Televised Select Board and Town Meeting Sessions.	Televised Council Meetings.
<i>2. Openness early in the decision process allows citizens to be part of the process.</i>	Financial projections jointly prepared by Select Board, School Committee, Library Trustees and Finance Committee in September.  Budget discussion at open meetings of finance committee, school committee and library trustees  Budget decision made by Town Meeting in May.	Financial projections and budget guidelines jointly prepared by Manager and Mayor presented to school committee, library trustees and Finance Commission in November.  Public hearings for school and library budgets before submission to Mayor. Council required to hold public hearing on entire budget.  Budget decision by Council in June
<i>3. Agendas and decisions should be publicized in a timely fashion.</i>	Select Board agendas and meetings posted 48 hours before meeting. Warrant (agenda) for Town Meeting available more than a month prior to meeting. Decisions available immediately.	Rules of procedure for agendas of Council to be decided. Decisions will be available immediately.
<i>4. Citizens have a right to expect full disclosure of the facts pertinent to the decision process.</i>	Minutes and decisions are recorded and made available after each meeting of Select Board and Town Meeting.	Minutes and decisions are recorded and made available after each meeting of the Council.

**D. Checks and balance of power among the executive, legislative, and administrative**

**Branches of government and the electorate**

<b>Consensus Statement</b>	<b>Currently</b>	<b>Proposed Charter</b>
<i>1.Shared responsibility among the various branches of government creates balance.</i>	Select Board sets warrant (agenda for Town Meeting), Town Meeting passes legislation, implemented by Select Board and Manager.	Mayor sets agenda for Council. Legislation enacted by Council, implemented by Mayor and Manager. Mayor has veto of Council measures. Council can override veto. Recall of elected officials is possible.
<i>2.Not all appointments should be made by any one branch of government.</i>	Moderator appoints Finance Committee. Select Board appoints Zoning Board of Appeals, Personnel Board, Election officers and other town committees. Manager independently appoints some Boards and Committees and appoints Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission and the Board of Health with approval of Select Board.	Mayor appoints Licensing Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission and the Board of Health subject to approval of the Council. President of the Council appoints the Finance Commission and members of standing committees of the Council. Manager may appoint other Boards.
<i>3.Referenda opportunities make the electorate part of the process.</i>	Process in existence	Same Process as currently
<i>4.Referendum process should not be too easy or too difficult.</i>	Process requires signatures of 5% of the voters within 5 days after the dissolution of Town meeting on the passage or rejection of any measure under the warrant.	Process requires signatures of 5% of the voters within 5 days of the passage of any measure of the Council.

**E. Honesty and non-corruptibility in all decision making**

<b>Consensus Statement</b>	<b>Currently</b>	<b>Proposed Charter</b>
<i>1.Access to decision makers should be open to all.</i>	Any resident of Amherst may speak at Town Meeting and 10 voters may submit articles for the warrant for Annual Town Meeting. 100 signatures are needed for Special Town Meeting	50 voters may submit a petition; Council has 90 days to act upon it. Council will adopt rules regulating its procedures.
<i>2.Town officials and appointees should not be susceptible to undue influence or beholden to special interests.</i>	Rules of the Open Meeting Law that apply to conflict of interest	The same plus new conflict of interest ordinance

**F. Efficiency based on professional management and timely decision making**

<b>Consensus Statement</b>	<b>Currently</b>	<b>Proposed Charter</b>
<i>1.Efficiency is important in the delivery of essential services.</i>	Manager is the Town Administrator.	Manager is the Town Administrator.
<i>2.In the policy-making process, efficiency is not as important as open and informed deliberation and citizen participation.</i>	Select Board initiates policy proposals for Town Meeting approval. Open discussion at Town Meeting prior to rejection or approval of policy recommendations	Council and Mayor will determine policies at open Council meetings with possible citizen input. Mayor will exercise general supervision over policy direction of all town agencies.
<i>3.All issues, including those brought up by citizen petitions and requests, should be acted upon in a timely manner so that the decision will be meaningful.</i>	All petition articles in the warrant must be acted upon before Town Meeting dissolves. Town Meeting meets at least twice a year.	Council not required to act on petition of one voter and can take up to 90 days to act on petition of 50 voters. Council will meet on a continuous basis throughout the year.

**G. Accountability for political and fiscal decisions**

<b>Consensus Statement</b>	<b>Currently</b>	<b>Proposed Charter</b>
<b><i>1. Decision makers should make clear the rationale for their decisions.</i></b>	All town committees and boards involved in bringing warrant articles forward explain their rationale. Some but not all Town Meeting members explain their positions.	9 Council members may express rationale for their decisions in open Council meeting. Mayor must submit budget message to Council. Mayor must give reasons in writing for veto of Council measure.
<b><i>2. The process of implementing decisions should be clear and understandable.</i></b>	Manager and Select Board responsible for implementation of Town Meeting decisions.	Mayor causes Charter, Laws, and Ordinances to be enforced.
<b><i>3. Full explanation of budget and appropriation items should be disclosed during deliberations.</i></b>	Finance Committee, School Committee, Library Trustees and Select Board explain budget at public meetings and Town Meeting.	School Committee, Library Trustees and Council discuss budget in public meetings. Mayor required to hold open public forum last week of March to focus on budgeting and other spending matters.