



Amherst League of Women Voters

Announcement of Consensus Meetings

Thursday, September 7, 7 p.m. in Room 101, Bangs Center

Discuss proposed change to the LWVA position on the Structure of Town Government

Thursday, September 14, 7 p.m. in the Glass Room, Bangs Center

Final action on proposed change to the LWVA position on the Structure of Town Government

BACKGROUND:

The LWVA Annual Meeting on June 1, 2017 agreed that a consensus meeting should be held in the fall to address the League position on the Structure of Town Government, specifically the statement:

"The League supports selectmen-manager form of government (1950, 1995)"

Two specific motions were passed: (1) that this meeting include a discussion of separating the question of supporting professional management from the question of support for the town meeting form of government, and (2) that the meeting include an option of removing the current position regarding the selectmen-manager form of government.

Changes to local program outside of annual meeting are governed by our bylaws, specifically Article IX, Program: Sec. 3, Program Selection, part (d):

"Changes in the adopted program, in the case of altered conditions may be made provided that:

- (1) Information concerning the proposed changes has been sent to all members at least two weeks prior to a general membership meeting at which the change is to be discussed; and
- (2) final action by the membership is taken at a succeeding meeting."

The two September meetings, together with this mailing, are intended to comply with these requirements.

PLEASE BRING THIS MAILING TO THE SEPTEMBER MEETINGS!

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

The two consensus meetings will deal with a single sentence in the LWVA position on the Structure of Town Government:

"The League supports selectmen-manager form of government (1950, 1995)"

The following options have been proposed:

- 1) No change.
- 2) Delete this statement.
- 3) Replace this statement with "The League supports the exercise of administrative functions of town government by a professional staff accountable to an elected policy-making executive body."

Additional options, including revision of the wording of option 3 above, are possible at the September 7 meeting.

PROS AND CONS

Option 1) No change

Pro:

The League has invested much time and developed detailed proposals to improve the current town meeting/select board/town manager form of government. Many of its suggestions have in fact been enacted.

Many members of the League prefer this form of government to the alternatives proposed to date by three Amherst Charter Commissions, while acknowledging continuing room for improvement. They believe the League should devote its energies to advocating for such improvements.

This statement was explicitly reaffirmed in 1995 on the recommendation of the League's Charter Task Force.

Con:

This statement is a historical relic. The context within which it was adopted has been almost forgotten.

This part of the LWVA position on the Structure of Town Government has not been used for public advocacy since the last referendum attempting to roll back the town manager form of government in the late 1950s.

This statement causes confusion among our members as well as the small fraction of the public that is aware of it. In particular, it calls into doubt the objectivity of any analysis the League may provide of any alternative Charter Commission proposal.

This statement might not survive the consensus process today.

Option 2) Delete

Pro:

Deletion will enable the League to be more flexible and objective in evaluating future Charter proposals, unencumbered by a nominal commitment to the town meeting/select board form of government.

Con:

This statement constituted the entirety of the League's positions on local government for two decades. Its removal would therefore delete the position on which much work of the League in its initial decade was based.

Option 3) Replace with a statement such as suggested above

Pro:

A statement such as “The League supports the exercise of administrative functions of town government by a professional staff accountable to an elected policy-making executive body” more accurately reflects the intention of the original 1950 statement, taking into account the context within which it was adopted. The continuation of Town Meeting was not in question in 1950. Rather, the debate concerned the hiring of a professional town manager to oversee the administrative functions of an Executive Branch that remained accountable in all policy matters to a Select Board.

Con:

Revision of the position beyond simply deleting the existing statement should take place only after a more extensive study to ensure that any new statement is in fact supported by consensus of the membership.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<http://www.lwvamherst.org/content/league-starts-planning-charter-review>

Links to LWVLA Positions on Local Government and to some additional history of these positions

<http://www.lwvamherst.org/file/lwva-bylaws-2016pdf>

LWVA Bylaws

<http://amherstma.gov/2248/Charter-Commission>

Preliminary report and draft Charter proposal from the Charter Commission.

If you would be willing to serve as one of the recorders for one or both of these meetings, please contact Kathy Campbell. Thank you!

TIMELINE FOR AMHERST CHARTER PROPOSAL

- August 31, 7 p.m. Public meeting for feedback on Charter proposal, Town Room, Amherst Town Hall
- September 7, 7 p.m. LWVA consensus discussion meeting, Room 101, Bangs Center
- September 14, 7 p.m. LWVA consensus action meeting, Glass Room, Bangs Center
- January-March 2018 LWVA-sponsored forum/information sessions on upcoming vote on Charter proposal
- March 27, 2018 Amherst Municipal Elections

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