



## CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

**Special Meeting**

**March 14, 2023**

Called for 8:00 p.m. broadcast from the Media Arts Studio, 454 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a presentation from the Cambridge Charter Review Committee and a discussion to share feedback, comments, and questions about the Cambridge City Charter.

Members Present: Vice-Chair Rachel, Member Fantini, Member Hunter, Member Rojas, Member Weinstein, Member Wilson, Mayor Siddiqui

Also Present: Cambridge Charter Review Committee (Kathleen Born, Chair; Anna Corning; Ellen Shacter; Kai Long and Faria Afreen)

Mayor Siddiqui in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

The Chair read the call of the meeting and explained that this meeting is being televised, votes will not be taken and there will be no public comment.

The meeting proceeded to the first order of business with a roll call of members present: Member Fantini PRESENT; Member Hunter PRESENT; Vice-Chair Rachel PRESENT; Member Rojas ABSENT; Member Weinstein PRESENT; Member Wilson PRESENT; Mayor Siddiqui PRESENT.

Mayor Siddiqui turned the meeting over to the Charter Review Committee's Project Manager Anna Corning who presented an overview of the Cambridge Charter Review Committee including its implementation and goals.

After the presentation, Mayor Siddiqui opened the floor to the Committee members for questions and discussion:

**Member Hunter** inquired about the terms for the School Committee members and if it is possible to extend the School Committee term beyond two years. Charter Review Committee Chair Born responded that currently, the School Committee term is in alignment with the term of the City Council. She mentioned that in some districts there is a rotational structure so committee members do not run against each other like in Cambridge.

**Vice Chair Rachel** expressed that the current two-year terms are hard to sustain and thought about the staggered terms and made wondering about the possibility of a three-year term. Chair Born shared some insight on how a three-year term affects the election commissions. At the moment, possible terms would be a two-year and four-year term. Four years shouldn't be at the same time as presidential elections as the election commission doesn't have the capacity for ballots for multi-elections.

**Member Weinstein** mentioned that in recent years it takes a lot of time and money to fund campaigns, especially with less time in between terms for two years. However, if we make terms too long then it limits the opportunity for others to campaign for seats since turnover isn't as frequent.

**Member Wilson** expressed her appreciation to the Cambridge Charter Review Committee. Cambridge is unique to do this work for the decades that have been doing elected official terms and expressed that it is

a lot of work to campaign, and it would be nice if the Committee was able to do three-year or staggering terms.

**Member Hunter** expressed interest in the possibility of a three-year term as she thinks it better serves the community if terms were longer. She also inquired if this conversation has been done with the City Council. Mayor Siddiqui announced that the City Council will be meeting with the Charter Review Committee on March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Ellen Shacter of the Charter Review Committee asked the Committee about their opinions about district vs. at-large seats.

- **Vice Chair Rachel** suggested that it would be nice if each school had a School Committee member and if it were to move to a district method she suggested it be hybrid with at-large seats.
- **Member Weinstein** mentioned that it would be a bit challenging to have district and at-large members

Chair Born inquired about the layout of the School Committee operations in the charter. Are there any issues within the School Department, or School Budget Operations? Any thoughts on the selection of the School Superintendent?

- **Member Fantini** asked about the budget and asked for the reasoning why there isn't a two-year budget. When there is a budget with no reduction then it limits community engagement.
- **Mayor Siddiqui** mentioned that there is a more engaging process with the School Committee versus the City side.
- **Vice Chair Rachel** responded that the school department has organized multiple meetings, surveys, and additional avenues to improve community and family engagement.

Kai Long inquired about the costs of campaigns and asked if the members feel like budget campaigns restrict diversity among runners. **Member Fantini** thinks that the costs of campaigns aren't expensive but the salary and the benefits the members receive can assist with the campaigns. **Vice Chair Rachel** suggested perhaps financing publicly backed campaigns can assist with more diversity amongst members.

- **Member Hunter** doesn't think campaign costs limit diversity but the two-year term does.
- **Member Wilson** inquired about the lack of securing funding when you are a public employee.

**Mayor Siddiqui** asked the Committee about their relationship with the City Manager

- **Member Wilson** mentioned that the relationship between the School Committee and the City Manager is almost nonexistent.
- **Vice Chair Rachel** mentioned that her feelings about the City Manager are more based on who she is as a resident rather than as a School Committee member.
- **Mayor Siddiqui** thinks it would be helpful to have the City Manager involved more when it comes to bargaining.
- **Member Fantini** would love to see more joint efforts between the Cambridge City Council and the School Committee including more joint meetings.
- **Member Wilson** mentioned parking and the battle it has been to gather educator parking and it would be nice if the City Manager can work with us to find a solution instead of working against us.
- **Member Weinstein** discussed gun violence and how synchronized problem-solving with the City can assist in combatting this issue.

Faria Afreen of the Charter Review Committee inquired about feedback and if the Committee has received any feedback from educators who are unable to join the Committee and government meetings due to their non-resident status.

- **Mayor Siddiqui** mentioned that the Committee hears from all school personnel no matter if they are residents or not.
- **Member Fantini** mentioned that the bargaining process includes tons of educators who voice opinions and are not residents of the city.
- **Member Weinstein** mentioned we hear from non-residents on issues frequently at our meetings during public comment.

Chair Born asked the Committee if there was anything that they would like to add to the charter about the selection of the Superintendent and adopting the school budget yearly. Is there anything that needs to be defined in the charter?

- **Mayor Siddiqui** mentioned bargaining which is something that the City Council does not do collective bargaining.

Chair Born requested that the School Committee members review the Charter and make suggestions or provide feedback. Anna Corning mentioned that the School Committee conversations will be a part of the review in June and requested any feedback from the Committee before then.

**Member Wilson** inquired about the NAACP's Cambridge branch and their position regarding the City's charter review. She discussed an agenda topic at an NAACP meeting - "*Can a Black Man Succeed in Cambridge?*" - highlighting that several black men with post-high school education had trouble finding employment in Cambridge. As residents of the city, we should analyze what is our responsibility to the students in the city so they will be able to succeed after high school. Chair Born mentioned that the School Committee can create a preamble or a value statement. Kai Long mentioned that the challenge is that initiatives are more inspirational than action-effective.

On a motion by Vice Chair Rachel, seconded by Member Fantini, on the following roll call the meeting was adjourned: Member Fantini YES Member Hunter YEA; Vice-Chair Rachel YEA; Member Rojas ABSENT; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA. (9:35 p.m.)

Attest:



Ariel B. Kennebrew  
Executive Secretary to the School Committee