

Charter Revision Commission Recommendations

As approved by the Board of Selectmen on January 14, 2026

The New England Town Meeting form of government is considered the most direct form of democracy. Unlike our national government, which is best described as a representative democracy, in the Town Meeting form of government that we in Woodbridge enjoy, our elected leaders are not our representatives; they are our direct agents and thus are supposed to be directly accountable to us. *Morris v. Congdon*, 277 Conn 565 (2006).

Pursuant to CGS § 7-190(b), the Board of Selectmen (BOS) may make recommendations to the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) to consider. Below is a list of recommendations for consideration by the CRC. If adopted by the BOS, these recommendations would not change or limit the scope of the CRC's work, they are simply recommendations for the CRC to consider. Pursuant to CGS § 7-190(b), the CRC is required to comment on each recommendation when it submits its report to the BOS, along with any additional changes or items it recommends.

Before addressing any specific topics for Charter Revision, we believe that the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) should first establish a set of criteria that will be used to systematically evaluate all proposed revisions. These criteria should reflect the overall goals of this Charter Revision process, which we suggest be guided by explicitly expressed values and principles. We believe that proposed changes to our Town Charter should:

1. *Increase direct democracy* that is the bedrock foundation of the New England Town Meeting form of government.
2. *Increase direct accountability* of Town officials to the voters.
3. *Increase the opportunity for participation* in town government for more residents.
4. *Increase transparency*, especially in the election and budget processes.
5. *Increase equity and fairness* to all town residents.
6. *Increase the need for consensus-building* on all town boards and commissions.
7. *Increase checks and balances* in our town government.
8. *Decrease the concentration of power* accorded to the Board of Selectmen.
9. *Decrease partisanship*.

With these principles firmly in mind, we recommend that the CRC focus on areas where Woodbridge diverges from state law, setting forth a model town governance framework.

Specifically, we suggest the CRC consider the following revisions, though not necessarily unanimously:

1. Remove the provision that grants the First Selectman a tie-breaking second vote on the Board of Selectmen.
2. Seat the losing First Selectman candidate on the Board of Selectmen if he or she receives more votes than two other candidates for the Board of Selectmen.
3. Require a machine vote on the Annual Town Budget.
4. Reaffirm the requirement for a referendum on the purchase, sale , or lease of town property (except for a lease of up to five years for solely agricultural purposes).
5. Clarify the language regarding what matters may be the subject of a Special Town Meeting requested by any resident via a Petition for Special Town Meeting, in addition to what matters must be the subject of a Special Town Meeting.
6. Elected offices: consider adding the Board of Finance and the Town Plan and Zoning Commission as elected offices.
7. Consider expanding §7-6 (b) to include Town Plan and Zoning (TPZ), which would prohibit members of TPZ from serving on other town commissions.
8. Terms of office: consider standardizing the terms of office at four years for all elected positions, including the First Selectman and Board of Selectmen.
9. Commencement of term of office, § 8-8: consider moving the start of term of elected and appointed offices from January 1 to December 1.
10. Election date-related language, §8-4: update all language in the charter to reflect the change of municipal elections from May to November.
11. Contract approvals and spending thresholds: update §4-8 and §98 regarding spending thresholds and purchasing to better reflect current costs and state statutes.
12. Farmland leases: consider updating §4-8 (b) to allow for longer-term leases, for up to 5 years of town-owned farmland without a referendum, provided the land is leased solely for agricultural purposes.
13. Qualifications, eligibility, and terms of Town Officers: review and evaluate the appropriateness of the professional qualifications for all Town officers, and ensure terms are consistent with state statutes.
14. Gender-Neutral Terms: Update language such that gender-neutral terms are used throughout the charter.