

Statement from Abstaining Member

My Statement on Why I Abstained, September 25, 2017

No vote I can remember has caused me more grief than this one. This statement attempts to explain where I am at and why.

There is no question that I was voted onto the Commission by strong advocates of Town Meeting because they knew that I love Town Meeting and its form of direct democracy. For the whole first year of serving on the Commission, from April 2016 to April 2017, my votes were unwaveringly in favor of improving Town Meeting rather than creating a city form of government. But my votes were always among the minority.

What happened to change my thinking? I heard from some supporters of Town Meeting I know well and respect, that the Charter would certainly pass regardless of the details. I heard that opinion repeated at our listening sessions from some angry residents. What if they were right? If there were going to be a new Charter, shouldn't I help shape it for the best? And I did.

My top two priorities for Town government when I ran were 1) a well-trained professional, hired on credentials to lead our town and 2) easy ways for citizens to petition for changes in the government. But I also wanted there to be maximum democratic participation by the greatest number of residents, not just advisory participation but with real decision-making authority. Those were the goals for the Charter that guided my votes. I supported a larger Town Council rather than a small one. I urged that there be some elected rather than only appointed persons for key committees. But the most important objective I had for our Town was that of a well-trained professional Town Manager. I pushed hard for that, it passed, and I am glad it is in the Charter though I lost other battles.

In summary, there are things I like about Town Meeting and things I don't. There are things I like about the Charter and things I don't.

I have promised not to oppose this new Charter, and I will not. But I also won't oppose those who want Town Meeting to prevail. I hope people will understand how hard this has been for me and why I decided to abstain and not campaign for either side. The citizens of Amherst have a choice, and their decision is the one that matters.

Diana Stein