



## WF CRC re:Cap #4 *January 5, 2021*

***THE TAKEAWAY:*** *CRC members and observers gained insight into how chief executives of Salem, Woburn, and Franklin discharge their responsibilities while assuring a culture of collaboration, accountability, and innovation. They also were urged to begin work to create a Preamble to the Watertown Home Rule Charter, which sets forth the vision and values of the community. Finally, they heard updates from the Communications Subcommittee, on eliciting more public involvement in the charter review process.*

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“All politics is local.”

—Former House Speaker Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill (D-MA)

“There seems to be so much more dynamism and creativity in these communities.”

—CRC observer and longtime Watertown resident

**T**ip’s quip came to mind during Watertown’s Charter Review Committee’s public meeting Tuesday night, not just for what he said but for what he left out. All politics may be local, but it’s hugely influenced by major non-local actors, whether it’s Wall Street investment banks and credit ratings agencies; State House and Washington D.C. lawmakers; international vendors and product supply chains; global warming and airborne microbes; or the reach of technology into just about every aspect of our daily lives, the range of influences is large.

In the end, though, local politics, and governance, primarily rely on the quality of interpersonal relationships — the give and take among us; the level of mutual regard, sense of belonging and worthiness; the opportunity to give voice to concerns and be heard; the knowledge that you have the power to make a difference. These intangible aspects mark the *spirit* of a community — its liveliness, dynamism, and creativity, as one observer at the January 5 CRC meeting noted. They may not show up in financial statements or contracts, but they very much affect the quality of life and the belief among residents that theirs is a good place in which to live. That “goodness” is a product of how people *behave* — be they elected or appointed, managers or staff, part-time or full-time workers, consultants, shopkeepers,

### ***Did You Know?***

**In the U.S., both indigenous communities and colonial settlers (including those who settled Boston and Watertown in 1630), viewed a “charter” as defining the “body politic” and “community.” Charters were both aspirational (visionary) and instrumental (who does what).**

transit riders, residents, or just ordinary people.

Tuesday's CRC meeting (agenda [here](#)), with its panel of municipal executive branch officials, showcased differences not just in governance *form* but in governance *style* (WCATV recording [here](#)). The plan was to hear the pros and cons of a Council–Manager versus Mayor–Council form of governance. These pros and cons were to be conveyed by the chief executives of three Commonwealth cities — Salem, Woburn, and Franklin — with a population, per capita income, and budget similar to Watertown's. (Comparability chart [here](#))

“Obviously none of them are perfect comparables, but there's enough similarity and significant value in hearing from them about their experience,” said **Mike Ward**, current director of UMass Boston's [Edward J. Collins Center for Public Management](#) who is advising the CRC and happens to live in Watertown. “Next time [on February 2], we'll hear from three councilors, two in a mayor form, and one in a manager form.”

**UPCOMING MEETINGS:** The CRC meets at 6:00 p.m. on the first and third Tuesday of each month. The next two meetings are slated for **January 19** and **February 2, 2021**. Agendas will be available within 48 hours of each meeting. Sign up for notifications [here](#).

### PARADIGM, PURPOSE & PRINCIPLES

Before turning to the panel discussion evaluating governance form, Ward advised the CRC to begin discussing the bigger question of vision. “You've all done great work in covering a lot of different ground on those initial themes that we've developed, but the one we haven't really touched on is a vision for the community, a vision for the town government,” he said. “Maybe some time at the next meeting, as well as the next meeting, you could get into this discussion of vision.”

He then proposed two ideas for Committee consideration, separate from the CRC decision on the matter of government form.

- First: create a Preamble for the [Watertown Home Rule Charter](#). “Many charters in Massachusetts have preambles that lay out the purpose of the charter and how it connects to the vision of the community,” he said. “They're brief, no more than a page long.”
- Second: create a Preamble Subcommittee to work on this. “Regardless of all the other discussions and decisions this Committee has, when things are a bit further along, you can come back and update what they've come up with,” he said. Ward then pointed to the [2015 Comprehensive Plan](#), which has a section on “Vision.” He went on to say that “it's too long for Charter, and not quite on point, but it's a good start,” and that the Collins Center would be happy to provide examples of other preambles.

Ward then was asked by CRC members and Town Councilors **John Gannon** and **Lisa Feltner** to clarify what he meant and provide examples. “I'd like to see some diversity affirmation in our charter,” Gannon said. “Is that something that other charters have added?”

Ward replied by citing the *Preamble* crafted by Framingham for [its most recent charter](#). (See text box)

## POLICY, PROGRAM & PRIORITIES

Once the panel of city chief executives got underway, what came across weren't just the strengths and stumbling blocks of a mayor-or-manager form of governance, but the different tone, spirit, and character of each city on display: its level of public engagement, of collaboration, of pragmatic optimism, of a civic pride and purpose that extends across the community and envelops City Hall. That, plus strong financial and departmental management, is a recipe for success, panelists said.

## PRACTICE, PROCESS & PARTNERS

"There's a culture of collaboration in our charter," said [Jamie Hellen](#), [Town Administrator](#) of Franklin. "You can't be successful in Franklin as an elected official or a professional without collaborating in the best interest of the public. Some of this is cultural, and how the previous tone was set. But a lot comes down to the [Town Charter](#)."

[Kim Driscoll](#) has been Salem's mayor for 15 years, and is a "huge fan of city management." Before that, she was the City of Chelsea's legal counsel and deputy manager. (Thirty years ago [Chelsea's governance was taken over](#) by a state-appointed receiver to restore fiscal and managerial accountability; fed up mayors, four years later Chelsea voters approved a new city charter with a Manager-Council form of governance that took effect in 1995.)

But Driscoll acknowledges the benefits of having a mayor when it comes to public engagement, particularly with civic groups. "There are a lot of grassroots efforts underway, beyond social media," she said. "There's a desire to communicate what you're producing, and work with them."

In addition, there's active outreach to engage the community. "In Salem, we do an annual resident survey, and like to look at that comparison over the years," Driscoll said. "We also have monthly Neighborhood Advisory Committee meetings, where speakers come in.

We also use a tool call "See / Click / Fix" to address problems. We haven't done a big master plan, but we'll do "corridor plans" for different neighborhoods, to ask how growth will impact those neighborhoods.

We also did a "One Salem" campaign, which encouraging cocktail drives, when Salem turns 400 in 2026. Some of that has been put on the backshelf due to Covid, but using Zoom enables more engagement anyway.

### City of Framingham Preamble

We, the people of Framingham, in order to reaffirm the customary and traditional liberties of the people with respect to the conduct of our local government, do adopt this Home Rule Charter.

We need and want a local government that represents all of us, that supports vibrant neighborhoods, provides quality schools, protects safe and secure homes, values our elders, celebrates diversity, supports local businesses, promotes community participation, and cares for those in need.

It is the expectation and intent that the Charter will continue and enhance voter participation, ethical, transparent and responsive leadership, wise use of public resources, respect for all in the community, and an engaged citizenry. We expect and intend that our government will promote equality, and be welcoming and inclusive.

In Woburn, [Mayor Scott Galvin](#) is a big believer in a strong mayor form of government but acknowledges the importance of collaboration and checks and balances. “The more you get involved, the more you realize the Council has pretty significant powers and checks and balances,” he said, characterizing the Mayor–Council model as “the purest form of government. You’re close to the ground. Your views are shaped by public opinion.

We’ve increased our [municipal] bond rating to the highest level from Standard and Poor’s — AAA. But if you don’t have the City Council working with you, it can be very difficult. Over time, you learn to collaborate. It’s a work in progress, but it’s the purest form of democracy.

Galvin has been mayor for 11 years, having served 16 years prior to that as a Woburn city councilor. His city profile webpage touts his “steadfast and successful financial management,” represented by its Triple-A bond rating from Moody’s — which later drew praise from CRC member and Town Councilor **Ken Woodland**. “Our [city charter has been in place since 1897](#),” he told the CRC and Zoom attendees. The [most recent amendments](#) to Woburn’s charter were made in April 2020.

**HOW TO WEIGH IN:** Residents who wish to communicate with the CRC can do so by sending an email to [crc@watertown-ma.gov](mailto:crc@watertown-ma.gov). Questions and responses will be posted on the CRC website.

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**Next steps:** The CRC discussion will continue on February 2, 2021 when CRC members and the public will hear from the aforementioned panel of town councilors, get further updates from the Communications Subcommittee, and begin to address the question of vision and values, anchored in a Preamble.

Meanwhile, 2021’s first wide-ranging session is best summed up by one of the Zoom attendees who remarked, “Accountability and transparency goes hand and hand with dynamism. Stagnation and entrenchment appear to do the opposite.” Tip O’Neill would be pleased.

—by *Marcy Murningham*, with editing assistance from *Vana Pistoftzian*

- For more on the January 4, 2021 deliberations of the CSR Communications Subcommittee, see [here](#)
- For more on Preambles, see “Vision Statement,” *Watertown Comprehensive Plan* (Adopted June 23, 2015), 1–4; and “Preamble,” *Framingham Charter* (2016–2017), 12; “[The Preamble: Conversation Starter 1](#),” American Bar Association; and “[The U.S. Constitution: Preamble](#),” United States Courts