

## MINORITY REPORT OF THE CHARTER COMMISSION 1996-1997

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**Dear Voters,**

Consolidation of power into the hands of a small group of people is an extreme proposal. We believe this city charter has serious flaws. Its passage will divide the community, destabilize our neighborhoods, and undermine the many positive changes we have already instituted. *We hope you will read this report and the full charter carefully and vote NO in April.*

- **Framingham is Working toward Excellence Now**
  - **Professional Town Manager**
  - **Chief Financial Officer and Finance Division**
- **We have instituted**
  - **Experienced, skilled management.**
  - **Centralized oversight of major departments through the Town Manager and an expanded Board of Selectmen.**
  - **Organizational changes for further efficiencies, accountability, and improved services.**
  - **Forums where people in government, business, education, and the community at large work together to solve problems and shape the future.**

*We have the benefits of an open, accessible democracy, skilled management and rational policy makers. Let us continue on this solid road!*

### **Why Give Up a Professional Manager for a Politician?**

***Poor Marks on Accountability, Representation, and Citizen Access*** This city charter fires our professional Town Manager and puts in a politician for a four-year term! Framingham has a \$124 million operating budget and our property is worth \$3.7 billion. A mediocre Mayor for four years is a high risk; a bad Mayor spells disaster.

This charter does NOT require the City Council to take roll call votes, to meet weekly (or even monthly) or to televise or tape record their

sessions. If a council seat becomes vacant, there is no requirement for a special election to fill the open seat. The charter fails to make sure that Councilors come from different districts. For the first six years, 7 of the 11 members could live in the same household! The commission rejected a compromise for one representative from each of the current 17 districts. *Is this accountable, representative government?*

This charter requires approximately 3000 signatures on petitions get an item on a school committee or council agenda -- and the council could make citizens wait for up to three months for a simple hearing. Is this responsive government? Now we need only 10 signatures to bring an issue before Town Meeting. 200 people can call a special Town Meeting, which can meet and act within three weeks!

### **Why Risk our Neighborhoods?**

***This charter is anti-neighborhood.*** Only 8 councilors are elected from districts. Who will represent Coburnville, Butterworth Park, Nobscot, Cherryfield, Salem End, Cushing Area, Pheasant Hill, Woodrow Wilson, the Junction or Saxonville? What about the Center, Downtown, the Musterfield, Woodfield, Mount Wayte, the Dennison area, Learned Pond, Farm Pond, Waushakum Pond, Lake Cochituate, the Oaks, and the neighborhoods around the reservoirs and the Sudbury River? What about all those neighborhoods on the edges of commercial districts?

**The Planning Board will no longer be elected or directly accountable to taxpayers and residents;** the Mayor and Council will appoint and determine its responsibilities. Ironically, we can still elect the Edgell Grove Cemetery Commission! Is planning the location of our cemetery plots more important than protecting the value of our homes?

**This charter failed to address the important planning and development issues Framingham faces. *Silence is not golden.***

### **Council of the Rich and Powerful - *Follow the Money***

Money is not a reason to be a city. Cities do not get more federal or state funds than do towns. Money aid is based on population, relative wealth, and special program applications.

### **Money is a good reason to vote NO.**

This city charter weakens the Chief Financial Officer Act . It puts the CFO

under the thumbs of the Mayor and Council. Just six Councilors can decide the budgets and taxes. Eight votes could change zoning and create millions of dollars of new debt. At a minimum both the Mayor and the Council will hire staff to assist them. What will this cost? The charter bans salaries to councilors, but leaves a back door open to *stipends* and payment of expenses. If this city charter wins, we will pay a \$200,000+ bill for starters. The Mayor gets the same salary and benefits as the current Town Manager. We will have to buy out the Town Manager's contract or find him another job.

**Candidates will spend \$8000-10,000 to win an at-large City Council seat.** The mayoral campaign costs will be significantly higher. Newton's last mayoral election cost each candidate over \$200,000! The charter fails to limit campaign spending. The doors of government may open only if you have or can raise money. Councilors and Mayors may be visible, but visibility is not the key to effective, honest government.

### **Is the Charter Budget Process Illegal?**

***Funding for Programs, Services and Education in Doubt*** Under this charter, the City Council can vote for programs or funding over or under what the Mayor requests. The Attorney General advised that the charter proposal "*could be found to be inconsistent with state law*". Mayors have power over budgets and councils cannot vote more money for most programs and services. Several court cases have confirmed the power of mayors. This cloud of doubt is a major defect in this city charter.

To get elected candidates for Mayor and Council do not have to support the educational needs of children, because the number of voters with school-aged children is not high. When the recently retired Superintendent of Schools addressed the Charter Commission, he pointed out that it takes a long time to build excellent educational programs. He also stated that four years of a mayor indifferent to schools could destroy a decade of hard work. If Framingham were to be a city, the Superintendent suggested that the school committee and city council sit together to develop budgets that balanced the total interests of the whole community. The charter commission majority flatly rejected this proposal.

Now Town Meeting can vote more or less money for Parks and Recreation, Libraries, Fire or Police - so long as the total budget is within tax limits. If

this city charter passes, we risk losing the right of our local legislature to fund services we want and are willing to pay for.

**We Believe in Positive Action**

We cannot support this city charter because it is a giant step backward. We will continue to work for constructive change that respects and honors the people of Framingham.

**We welcome your help and ideas.**

- **Honorable Barbara E. Gray, M. P.A.**  
Former State Representative  
Former Member Planning Board  
875-0597
  
- **Deborah D.Blumer, M. B. A.**  
Former Chairman, Finance Committee  
Former Town Meeting Member  
879-0658
  
- **Honorable Mary E. Murphy, Ed. D.**  
Member Historical Commission  
Member Tercentennial Commission  
Former Town Meeting Member  
875-8966