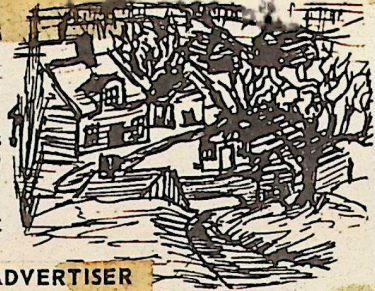


VI. 92  
View  
by Andrea  
Leonard



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What IS the Charter we keep hearing about, anyhow?

It's a written plan of operation for governing the Town of Barnstable. It's Barnstable's Constitution.

In 1969 a nine-man Commission was elected by Barnstable voters to study town government and prepare a plan under which the town would continue to operate. Before that, although it was incorporated in 1639, tradition formed the base for running our town.

The first Charter Commission recommended reorganization of the legislative body which ran the town's business for over three hundred years.

It established the present Selectmen-Representative Town Meeting Plan; until then Barnstable Selectmen received direction from the voters in open Town Meeting.

With rapid population growth, open Town Meeting became unsatisfactory; there was no hall large enough to accommodate all the voters; furthermore, it was widely felt Town Meeting was attended by relatively few voters and was controlled by special-interest groups.

Town Meeting Members elected by voters of their precincts, it was believed, would more fairly represent all the voters.

The new system maintained the traditional form of town government, but reduced the number of people entitled to cast votes at Town Meeting to a small, cross-section, of the population.

Regulations under which a Town Charter may be written require conformity to the General Laws of the Commonwealth as passed by the State Legislature, and before being submitted to the voters for approval a Charter must be approved by the State Attorney General.

Certain changes in the proposed new Charter coming up for voter-approval in March, 1974, result from state laws passed since our Charter was first accepted at the 1970 Annual Town Election.

One such change, for example, is that, at present, the Town Meeting Membership is based upon the formula of 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the number of registered voters in each precinct.

The new Charter proposes a formula of 1% of the number of inhabitants of each precinct, based upon the 1971 state census, and limits the membership to 240 people.

The General Laws now require the base be inhabitants rather than voters which greatly expands the base from which Town Meeting members are elected, including, as it does, all adults, whether or not they are registered voters, as well as all children.

The General Laws also require that before the next state census in 1981, the entire town be re-districted so each precinct will contain approximately an equal number of inhabitants.

It is these changes in the General Laws which prompted the present Commission -- nine men elected last March to study and recommend changes in the Charter -- to adopt the new formula and limit the number of Town Meeting Members.

As Barnstable grows, its facilities must expand to meet citizen needs. Without advance-planning for high-cost items, the taxpayer is the victim, as in the present system, because no provision has ever been made for planning ahead.

The new Charter also provides for a Purchasing Agent who will centralize purchasing for all departments. The prospects for economy in this office are encouraging.

Two departments have been shaken up considerably. Recreation will be responsible only for recreation and the Department of Public Works will be divided into four parts: Public Grounds and Buildings, Highways and Vehicle Maintenance, Engineering and Inspection, and Sanitation.

This change will eliminate duplication of equipment and personnel; now some parks are the responsibility of the Highway Department and others that of Park and Recreation.

Actual personnel changes, it is foreseen, will not be spectacular. It is not believed economies will result from reduction in salaries. It is believed, however, the departments will function more efficiently if systematically organized, and we, the people of Barnstable, will benefit.

You will soon receive in the mail the Final Report of the Proposed New Revised Charter of the Town of Barnstable.

Although it's a 17-page document, wordy,

Other changes in the Charter coming before the voters in 1974 give Town Meeting Members more power than ever before to control actions of the Selectmen.

Town Meeting can recall any elected town official if his performance of duty is unsatisfactory. Members from each precinct can recall any Member from their own precinct for cause.

Town Meeting will also annually approve or disapprove salaries of town officials. These include the Selectmen, Town Counsel, Town Accountant, Deputy Assessor, Purchasing Agent, Health Agent, and Directors of Natural Re-