

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



For Immediate Release: 01/14/2023

Contact Person: Ligia Madeira
508-821-1000

MAYOR O'CONNELL PROVIDES CHARTER UPDATE: People Now Have a Voice on Charter Changes

Taunton, MA . . . Today Mayor Shaunna O'Connell announced that prior to leaving office Governor Charlie Baker signed the bill providing for a revised Charter for the City of Taunton. The revised version of the Charter was approved by the Taunton City Council and passed by both houses of the Massachusetts Legislature before being signed by the Governor. The final step towards adoption of the proposed Charter now sits with the citizens of Taunton when it goes for a final vote of approval at the November 2023 election.

"I am pleased Governor Baker signed the bill proposing the City's updating of the Charter so that the people of Taunton can have their voices heard on it," said O'Connell. "It has been over a century since our City's Charter has been comprehensively modernized and the new changes will improve city governance and deliver increased accountability. I am very thankful for the many people who have put so much time and effort into revising our Charter, including the Hoye Administration and the past and current Charter Advisory members. We have all worked toward a shared goal of creating a more transparent and responsive city government for our residents."

Mayor O'Connell expressed gratitude for the efforts of state delegates who advocated on behalf of passage of the bill, paving the way for Taunton residents to have their say in a local election. State Representative Carol Doherty said, "I was pleased to work beside Representatives Patricia Haddad and Norm Orrall, my House colleagues, to move the Taunton City Charter through a complex vetting process to the Governor's desk for his signature before the close of the session. The Charter legislation emanated in the Senate and passed to the House for enactment just before Christmas. The Charter will now be placed before the people of Taunton for their consideration."

After numerous attempts over the years, the Taunton City Charter is poised to receive its first set of major updates since 1909. The initiative was prioritized under the leadership of Mayor O'Connell and brought to fruition through the dedicated efforts of the Charter Advisory Committee, City Council members and committed Taunton residents.

City Councilor Christopher Coute was very pleased when he heard of the Charter's progress. "It was a true honor to serve as Chair of the Charter Advisory Committee. I am elated to see it passed on Beacon Hill. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Charter Advisory Committee who worked diligently alongside Mayor O'Connell, who made it one of her top priorities

when she first took office. These changes were well overdue and 100 years in the making. This great achievement will bring Taunton up to the 21st Century, where it belongs!”

The proposed Charter, which focuses on creating a modernized governing system with increased transparency and accountability, includes the following changes:

- The Mayor serves a four-year term with a limit of three consecutive terms.
- Municipal Council members serve three-year staggered terms with a limit of four consecutive terms in office.
- School Committee members serve three-year staggered terms with a limit of four consecutive terms in office.
- Five regular Zoning Board members and two alternate members serve three-year staggered terms with a limit of four consecutive terms in office.
- Seven Planning Board members serve three-year staggered terms with a limit of four consecutive terms in office.
- City residents will be able to participate in City governance through residents’ initiative petitions.
- Recalls will be available for the Mayor, members of the Municipal Council or any elected officeholder in the City.
- An Audit Committee composed of three City Councilors and two mayoral appointments provide an annual audit of the City’s financial records.
- Establishment of a Capital Improvement Program which requires regular reviewing of City facilities to ensure necessary projects are completed expeditiously.

Notably, staggered terms for City Council members ensures smaller candidate fields, giving newer candidates a greater chance at promoting themselves among their fellow candidates and allowing for more visible representation of diverse candidates during each election cycle.

Charter Advisory members were gratified to witness the progress being made to move Taunton forward. “As a lifelong passionate Tauntonian, it was a distinct honor to accept Mayor O’Connell’s invitation to serve as a member of the Charter Advisory Committee,” said committee member Willitts Mendonca. “After working diligently with a bi-partisan, community-wide team whose efforts have been invaluable, the proposed Charter’s recent passage by the Massachusetts Legislature and signing by former Governor Charlie Baker is a proud moment, and brings our City one step closer to ensuring effective and balanced governance for years to come.” ###