

Any additional thoughts on the Legislature, as currently proposed?

Long Answer

54 of 99 Answered (54.5%)

1. Fewer precincts could be arranged, maybe 5 or 6, and then a 2 or 3 at-large councilors so as to have 7-9 members.
2. I am not a firm no on the council-by-precinct, but my concern is that it could limit the people of color who get elected. If it were not for that, I would like the 1 member per precinct idea (plus the at large).
3. I feel a larger group will better represent the town's residents. The smaller the group, the less likely it is to have a diversity of opinions and stakeholders represented.
4. Ordinarily I'd want this to be a smaller group. But the advantages of having each precinct represented outweighs the disadvantage of such a large governing group.
5. Personally I do think it's too big, but practically, we need a plan that will be widely popular, and I think this large size could win over some who are on the fence.
6. Retain Representative Town Meeting
7. That I have responded above should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the idea of a council. I prefer the Town Meeting form, as being more responsive to the will of the entire town. The idea of a very large council, 30-60 members, is appealing, since it maintains some of the size advantages of TM, but I'd prefer that the CC offer the citizens a system that's a clear alternative to TM, and then see what the citizens prefer.
8. Two year terms are too short, keeps people in constant campaign mode. Keep everyone at the same length for a term and make the terms three or four years.
9. We currently have a legislature that as a total body, represents the range of perspectives & stakeholders in Amherst. A small 13 person Council not be in any way a representative body & it could not possibly give voice to the range of concerns & interests that accompany major decisions. Furthermore, the "neighborhood councils" would peter out, having no power. A 60 person legislative council is manageable; there are excellent models in MA & CT of how they function; it would allow for a separation of powers and a balance of powers. Some of the "problems" that CC members have listed with the current TM would be alleviated by a smaller body, that still allows for 2 members per year to be elected, on three 3-year cycles. Other "problems" can be alleviated by the ongoing work of the TMCC subcommittee to identify & find corrections to problems in Town Meeting.
10. What did your study and research into similar sized New England towns show is the optimum size of a city council in terms of effectiveness and having diversity in terms of sex, ethnicity, age, economic class and ideas. What size was most effective? 50-60 would satisfy most of these concerns, but would need to break up into committees, which could be a great way to get ideas worked out and utilize councilor's areas of experience. How much were city councilors paid? Who decides that? How much did it cost for city councilor's run for election. What was the diversity of New England city councilors by sex, age, ethnicity, economic background?

11. A 5-4 Commission vote on this draft is concerning. I'd like to see compromising redrafts that can be brought to the voters; risking such suggests that it is unlikely to pass and will deepen Town divisions. Not a byproduct anyone invested in our Town wishes. Also, I don't believe that the council as proposed above rises to the level of a legislature.
12. How will it be possible to have regular people, and not just politicians, campaign, run for and be able to do a good job, at being council members, aware and knowledgeable of the government structure, and actually study the situations they need to make decisions about? How will we make sure no insider dealings, cronyism happens?
13. I am concerned about only one council member per precinct; how will that represent a divergence of views within a precinct? Much less democratic.
14. I like the proposed legislature. It is a tremendous improvement over the Town Meeting.
15. I think the entire model is not good. I came from a community that had a Mayor and Council and the Council was not effective.
16. If you would like to vary the size of the legislature (make it slightly larger or slightly smaller) or vary the terms or vary how you do the "at-large" position, then I have no opinion. My one opinion is this - abolish representative Town Meeting. A true Town Meeting is a cherished tradition of New England politics, but representative Town Meeting is a foolish substitute. Amherst's size and unique demographics are simply not appropriate for Town Meeting in any form.
17. Keep the Town Meeting. I have lived in several mayor/council communities, and in all cases the developers and builders dominated the governments.
18. Much too authoritarian.. the voice of the people will be irrelevant. If I want efficiency in government I would take a return boat to USSR which my family fled to live in freedom.
19. None of these options are anywhere near as democratic as currently composed Town Meeting. My unqualified, unmitigated preference is for Town Meeting.
20. Should be much larger in order to be representative of the whole town, not just the leisure class with money to run costly political campaigns and interest in making deals with developers, etc.
21. At least one member of the council should be on the school committee -- hopefully there will only be one school committee.
22. Having only one elected member per precinct -- down from 24 -- substantially reduces residents' ability to be effectively represented. Rather than a diversity of views, representing what is an equal diversity of views per precinct -- a strength of democracy, though a weakness of autocracy -- each precinct will now have but one point of view. I don't see how this really strengthens residents' ability to feel assured that their views will be heard. Additionally, the Charter Commission has emphasized accountability -- whatever that may mean. Setting up at-large positions that effectively have free rein for 4 years seems to counter the supposed desire for accountability.
23. I do not like this proposal. It is going to be much harder for ordinary people to participate in this process and be elected. I prefer to keep Town Meeting at 240 or even to go back to regular Town Meeting of all members of the Town being able to come.
24. I prefer a smaller Town Meeting to the current council proposal. Question: would councilors' terms be staggered so that approx. half are elected each year? That would be helpful.

25. I think it's a great way to keep the hyper-local aspects of town meeting, while reducing the size to something more manageable. I think that one representative per precinct makes them very accountable to their constituents.
26. I think the proposed structure is an excellent balance of having representation by precinct but also representation for a broader, townwide vision. I think the small size will allow for qualified people to be elected, that will be able to understand the issues before them. And precincts will be able to chose candidates knowing their positions, and who will actually be charged with representing them.
27. I think we're clinging to the idea of a larger town legislature because some of us don't want to let go of Town Meeting. In such a small town, we don't need a large legislature and a mayor. However, practically speaking I worry that if we stagger terms and run some races as at-large while others are by precinct, we will overwhelm voters with constant elections, drain our resources, and confuse constituents who will not know where to go in order to file complaints or request new laws or policies. We do better by keeping things simple-- a mayor with a small(er) council/ legislature that is elected every four years by precinct elections.
28. I would prefer all at-large members, as per the current Select Board
29. Need more at large and fewer by precinct. This proposal encourages over-identification by precinct, a problem we don't have now.
30. This number of people allows for a robust full discussion at a meeting. My experience is when the size grows the ability to really participate drops significantly.
31. 60 people is way too many for effective discussion and decision making.
32. Expanding the council to 60 would be a terrible idea. It muddles the accountability of each council member, requires more people in town to commit to a rigorous schedule, requires more total compensation (or if compensation is reduced pro rata, decreases the incentive for qualified people to serve), and makes it more prone to "rubber stamp or veto" action rather than deliberation and planning. Moreover, it provides neither "Pro-Town Meeting" nor "Anti-Town Meeting" sides the opportunity for their vision to prevail at the ballot.
33. I filled this out last week and thought 13 was too large. 60 is absurd. We have a moment in time to improve our town governance structure and moving to a mayor with a 60 person council is absolutely useless. Our town has insufficient town governance because of so many conflicting goals and no one able to internalize town issues. 60 people will make any governance decision slow and cluttered reduce the likelihood of us actually benefiting from a mayor. I'm really disappointed this was voted in.
34. I like the idea of having the At-large members constitute an Executive Committee of the Council. It could meet every week, while the 60 member body would probably meet monthly.
35. The Council should certainly be no larger than 13!
36. The current proposal of 60 members is by far too large and does not change the problems faced by Town Meeting: 1) too hard to for residents to know who their representative is and their stances on issues 2) too cumbersome to track how they voted to hold them accountable for their representation, 3) too many players for the reps to feel that they need to be deeply educated on an issue before they vote with only

1 out of 60 possibility of swaying a vote; 4) too easily elected by only a few friends/neighbors makes campaigning unnecessary.

37. The idea of a SIXTY MEMBER council is outrageous! How is a meeting going to be held, will each person get 60-120 seconds to speak, and everyone speaks ONCE with no dialogue or back-and-forth discussion? Also, have all the council terms be 4 years.
38. The latest watered down, potentially illegal, unwieldy, unprecedented size of the town council is a joke, right? Congratulation on Mayor/Manger/council unanimous decision. Now learn from other towns/cities with the model and attach the appropriate number of council members to best serve our town, not a number of people who are clinging to the past out of fear and potential loss of their illusion of control.
39. the new proposal for 60 council members seems too large; the council would be unwieldy.
40. THE PROPOSED 60 PERSON COUNCIL IS UNACCEPTABLE, JUST TOWN-MEETING LIGHT, STILL WITH NO ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE ABILITY FOR A TYRANNY OF THE MINORITY THAT THROWS WRENCHES IN THE WORKS.
41. 13 is a manageable size--people will have a clear sense of what the candidate they are voting for represents, 13 qualified people can be found who will be able to understand complex issues. 60 is way too big and would be an extremely ineffective governing body.
42. 13 yes; 60 no. 60 can not be representative, can not discuss/debate, can not meet often enough.
43. A 60 member legislature will have the same flaws as a 240 member body. It needs to be smaller.
44. A council of 60 members is untenable and unnecessary given the size of Amherst. It would not increase accountability, which is a core value that the new charter must embrace. We need a numbers that will be more nimble. Why would amherst need a council so much larger than any other municipality in the US??? We are already a laughing stock, because of our structure. Let's try to make it better, more compact, more accountable. A reasonable size is one per precinct and a few at large. We do support a mayor/council charter, just not one of this excessive size.
45. I don't like the idea of a council at all and believe Town Meeting is much preferable.
46. I really would like to have a small number of people on the council. Any larger than 13 (which seems large to me) continues to make it confusing as to how to make my voice heard with my elected representatives. I like the idea of a balance between precinct-elected and at-large members, and I realize that model requires a number like 13, but if there is any way to shrink that, I think it's a good move.
47. I think the 60 person council is an interesting idea since it preserves, to some extent, the wide expertise and experiences that we now have with Town Meeting. We are a town with many backgrounds and points of view and a big council would be able to draw on that. By developing ways to effectively research issues and work together, the council could serve as a model government for other towns. I am glad that the Charter Commission is committed to including many voices and citizens in our town government, since this has worked out so well in the past. Amherst has been in the forefront of many innovative actions.
48. Please don't have a large council; you'd be creating "TM light." Since TM is so unwieldy and unresponsive (to anyone other than its members) let's not have just another version of it. Thanks for all your time and effort.
49. The 60-member council is a terrible idea, in my opinion. It would perpetuate one of the most serious problems of TM, namely, people don't know their representatives and representatives don't answer to precinct constituents. It is clear enough to me that this proposal is supported by those who want the charter to fail. Please give us a clean option for a normal mayor-council

form of town government and let us vote it up or down. Please don't ruin the work done thus far by proposing a doomed-to-fail charter. I hope you'll listen to those in town who supported the charter commission and not cater only to those who want to keep TM.

50. The proposed 60 members is a very upsetting idea. It is unwieldy and embarrassing. We are a small town and need an accountable government system. A small town council will ensure accountability.
51. I definitely don't like the idea of having just one rep in the council for each precinct. So if we disagree on an issue, I can bet being representative goes out the window. The only thing a 13 member council worth is doing developers' and Amherst For All's bidding.
52. I'm so happy that the council size is back to 13. I think that's a very manageable, productive, and accountable size. THANK YOU.
53. It needs to be large enough to offer diverse views, have voices from each area of town, while also having people who aren't tied to one area of town over another - looking at the big picture. I love the at large seats. Please do NOT go with the 60 member group - what's the point??? We don't need a "mini" town meeting - ugh.
54. Reduce number of precincts to five, have 5 elected council members (1 per precinct, obviously!) plus 3 at large.

Any additional thoughts on the Executive, as currently proposed?

Long Answer

46 of 99 Answered (46.5%)

1. Amherst has done well with a Town Manager. The arguments for a Mayor are fallacious, especially the idea the UMA Chancellor or Amherst College President will go pay more attention than currently to any town figurehead. They won't, & we will have given up strong professional skills & management. I don't want a mayor & do want a Town manager. I think the Select Board should be smaller (3, not 5) & there could perhaps be a top-vote-getter First Selectperson in the Mayoral spokesperson capacity if such is needed.
2. Any position such as a Chief Admin Officer should serve at the pleasure of the Mayor.
3. Having a mayor will introduce a political element to running town government that we currently don't have. Staff will be hired and fired according to their loyalties and commitment to the mayor and his/her policies. Professional town management is needed and has served Amherst well. Also, the mayor cannot be an expert on running a \$20 million town government and 2 \$40 million school committees. Having an elected mayor will intro greater money politics, with tens of thousands going into elections. The candidate raising the most money is most likely to win, as evidenced almost everywhere. Getting rid of a mayor will take enormous effort and money. How much are mayors paid? Who decides this? What was the diversity of mayors in New England by sex, age, ethnicity, economic background?
4. I am not firm about Mayor being on the school committee. But since schools are such a huge part of the budget it seems like a good idea.
5. I don't think a mayor is necessary and prefer a professional administrator manage the town. We require a relevant degree, experience and a careful vetting for the manager now. Substituting without credentials (except popularity) isn't an acceptable trade off. If the Commission persists with a mayoral form, then all mayoral hires should be subject to council approvals as a small check against hack hiring. All town positions should have job descriptions with minimum qualifications at hire.
6. I would prefer a professional manager who is not a political appointee.
7. I'd think the chief of staff should report to the mayor and be fireable by her/him
8. If the Mayor has prescribed duties that are much like a town manager, I'm not sure the Chief Administrative Officer would be necessary.
9. I'm not in favor of a mayoral system, but, as above, I'd recommend that the CC recommend something that's a clear alternative to what we have. In general, I'm in favor of professional management. I really want to avoid the change in leadership and middle management that happens along with election cycles.
10. Without a chief of staff we could end up with inefficient government (if the elected mayor is incompetent)
11. Chief of staff should not be hired by the mayor.

12. How much more expensive will it be to pay the Mayor/council government than the current one?
13. I just want to say that I think right now that problem with our current town governance is that no one is internalizing the problems of the town. A mayor would finally allow us to do this. Creating too large a council may go back to placing a lot of emphasis on things that take away from overall 'internalization' of town issues.
14. I love the Mayor idea.
15. Keep the Town Meeting. A mayor will have too much power and be under obligation to monied interests.
16. No Mayor No Politicians No Campaign Financing by moneyed interests
17. Not only are these options much more expensive than current form of governance, it is so easily corrupted unlike a 240 member body representing our town.
18. Please consider having a much larger number of people in town government. Too few and we are at risk of them becoming aligned with a particular ideology and voting according to the desires of their donors.
19. we already have an Executive; it's called the Select Board
20. Yes, but I am not sure about which of the first two options to choose, "make sure the mayor is in charge" vs "have some real power separate from the mayor"
21. A mayor could be elected with NO experience in running a town. Our town manager is highly skilled and losing those skills would be a shame. I'm not sure what it means to say "mayor is in charge." I hope the town manager or administrative officer will take direction from the rest of the executive branch. I really don't like the idea of mayor because it is a POLITICAL role and I've seen/read about many mayors who turn out to be influenced by power, money, etc. The proposal seems to sacrifice democracy at the feet of efficiency. Democracy is messy but the goal should be for the citizens in town to feel like they have a chance to express their opinions and have an impact on town policy. Right now I'm happy that there are many mechanisms in Amherst to effect change. It would be very sad if we were to lose some of that ability because power is being concentrated in the hands of a very few number of people.
22. Completely abandoning a Town Manager does concern me a bit; I like the idea of a long-term permanent employee in a chief managerial position for stability.
23. I don't like a Mayor form of government. I prefer Town Manager. Mayoral campaigns are expensive to run, and mayors become very political figures, dominating the town. I much prefer something more democratic.
24. If the whole idea of having a mayor is more accountability in town government -- again, whatever that may mean -- then the mayor should be the one making decisions about the administration of the town. By requiring the hiring of essentially what we already have -- a town manager -- you simply add another expensive position to the town government, and, while a new, inexperienced mayor could conceivably benefit from the experience of a professional manager, that makes one ask the question: What exactly is the mayor doing? Is he a policy cheerleader, or is he here to actually provide real and substantive direction for the town? In my view, we are not necessarily going to get something better for the town should we change who heads the town; we will merely

get something different, with its potential attendant benefits but also its known problems.

25. I'm unable to support a charter that does not include a professional Town Manager. One need only look to our enormously successful history of managers. Why eliminate it, or substitute an officer or staff position? In an ever more challenging and complex town environment?
26. Need to avoid having mayor say s/he can save money by not hiring or by firing chief of staff
27. Strong leadership will allow vision and strong partnerships to grow in Amherst. This is vital for our long term health.
28. This is not a good choice. A mayor cannot learn the craft of professional administrator and CEO may or may be able to learn to work with a given mayor. Who/how will policy be decided? What about a CFO, and how can we afford all this expensive personnel?
29. We don't need a Town Manager type of assistant to the Mayor, that creates confusion and is too costly. The Mayor has the heads of the departments who can provide needed information and advice.
30. We should keep the professional manager position, to ensure stability and long-range nuts-and-bolts planning not dependent on the vagaries of political races.
31. A mayor will be a step in the right direction for Amherst! We need someone who can be held accountable, who voters recognize, who shows up to work every day thinking about the future and infrastructure of our town, who can build strong relationships with the universities, and who is clearly in charge for big decisions in town. I do not think the mayor should be in charge of school committee nor should be a voting member; a separation of powers is important for a strong, vibrant democracy.
32. Good to have a strong mayor, aided by a skilled administrator, for making effective decisions and implementing them.
33. I am not sure what is the Charter Commission's analysis is of the functioning and problems with our current school committees. Nor do I understand what the mayor would bring to the school committees. I need to know more and understand how the mayor would function on the school committees before I could offer an opinion. I am strongly in favor of having a town manager, whatever you call it, since s/he brings deep management experience and knowledge of municipal issues to town government. A mayor is not likely to have that depth of experience. Charter Commission could look at town manager-city council government more deeply and see how that model has worked in practice in other communities.
34. I like having an elected Mayor as the executive head of Amherst more than just having a Town Manager. I think it would be helpful for there to be a professional CAO/CoS to aid the Mayor. Such a person should be appointed not elected & could provide continuity behind the scenes as Mayors come & go with election cycles.
35. I like the idea of a Chief Administrative Officer/Chief of Staff, but the Mayor is the one to set policy and be accountable for the major policy decisions.
36. I really like the Mayor as the single point of contact for the town and the full separation from the legislative body. I'm not sure I understand why there are so many ideas around linking the Mayor to the school committee. I would need to understand more how the

school committee operates, who they report to, and how their decisions become implemented, to be able to understand how the Mayor should be involved.

37. If the Mayor is not able to choose/hire the Charter Commission needs to go all in on changing the structure of government and forcing the Region to disband. Other the superintendent of schools, for K-12, no matter what form of government is created will still fail. The schools account for 60-65% or so of the budget and for the region too much power rests with the 3 hill towns despite the fact Amherst pays for 85-90% of the region's budget. The charter commission needs to go al in and change the entire structure of government, including the schools relationship to the town/city. Otherwise gross inefficiencies and major lack of accountability will remain, dooming the new government to failure.
38. Just please reduce the size of the city council.
39. Mayor-COO good thinking. Don't let extra dollars spent for Mayor/COO hold us back from betterment.
40. The Mayor's role should include administering Town departments.
41. 60 council members is a non-starter that will almost certainly doom the charter, and change is desperately needed
42. A STRONG NO Re putting the Admin assistant in the charter! This person would hire dept heads!? That's the mayor's job! The mayor needs to be accountable to his/her constituents; if there's dissatisfaction with how the town works The People need to be able to hold an elected officeholder accountable! This would be the same mistake made last time a charter was presented for a vote --DON'T DO IT!
43. How does Northampton divide duties? They seem to do a good job. I would not describe manager bob as having "power," more like having "responsibilities."
44. I don't like the idea of the Mayor hiring the town manager (without election) and then the town manager hiring other staff, again without election. That's a great way to keep everyone on staff only accountable to the mayor.
45. I really like the idea of a Mayor heading the executive branch. The single point of contact (and accountability) is a huge advantage, in my mind.
46. Let the mayor decide what staff they need! Of course they will need strong staff supporting their goals, but why do we need to dictate that??? Why do we think we know best? Maybe the Mayor will want two people with diverse areas of expertise to cover separate areas of town business rather than one super administrator? My biggest opposition to our current form of government is having an un-elected Town manager who stays as long as they want to. Only a small group of people evaluate them and they do not have to be responsive to average citizens (although obviously, the best ones are). I want to finally have a Mayor who is hired and evaluated at the polls by the voters, not the select board! That said, give them four years to do their job. A Mayor who stands for election every two years would be a terrible cycle where they would always be running for reelection.

Please provide us with your thoughts on the inclusion of Neighborhood Meetings in the Charter, including any ideas on formation, leadership, etc.

Long Answer

49 of 99 Answered (49.5%)

1. Again, fewer precincts than currently.
2. I always like the idea of a neighborhood meeting but don't know what CC wants to achieve here. What information have you collected on this idea? Where do they do this and is it effective -- at what? What does "in a meaningful way" mean? This idea is vague and it's not clear what CC wants it to achieve with it.
3. I don't think participation should be required, but I hope the rest of the system is structured so that it would be really stupid for a councilor to miss such a meeting!
4. I like the idea of neighborhood meetings, so residents can help councilors and the mayor stay in touch with the needs of the community.
5. I'm repeating myself, but we don't need this layer if we keep Town Meeting, especially if the TMCC keeps its 'Meet your Precinct Town Meeting Candidates events leading up to TM elections.
6. Interesting idea but it does require more thought on my part to offer meaningful comment
7. Seems like neighborhood meetings would attract the less busy and more cranky, which could give a mistaken impression of how most people feel.
8. The more communication, the better, and this seems like one form of communication and dialogue.
9. There needs to be a forum for people to have discussions of important issues with their representative on the Council. However, this should not be the only channel for Councilors to be in touch with voters in their Precinct.
10. These meetings would be difficult for parents/people who work a lot/ etc to attend. How would you make sure that they are accessible to all? Also, what the point if there is no decision power, couldn't neighbors just show up to hearings on issues in city council. Seems like ersatz TM.
11. "Someone" (NOT the precinct councilor) should appoint an organizer/moderator of these meetings. The councilor should be present but not lead the meetings. I LOVE this idea of Neighborhood Meetings. We need to engage a broader range of voters - we need to hear from younger voters and voters from a variety of classes and races. They are not currently being heard or represented.
12. Folks don't show up to meetings now. What makes the Commission think they would show up to Neighborhood meetings? Folks don't have enough time to go to meetings except for those of us who are committed to the issues.
13. I think it's important in modern society to be able to communicate via email with the councilors.
14. I would prefer at-large representatives rather than precinct representatives. But if we have precinct representatives, then my answers above apply.

15. Meetings with the public are always manipulated, and they require no real follow-up. They tend to be public relations activities of little real consequence.
16. Neighborhood meetings only make sense if there are 6 legislative council members involved. Then there can be real discussion & deliberation. With 1 councillor only, it's a power toss-up. I firmly oppose a 13 member Council.
17. Regular people will already be excluded from any kind of decision making, they will only be stuck footing the bill in paying the taxes. A neighborhood meeting with the councillor there at least will make them feel they actually have a say.
18. This would be key part of creating accountability which we do not have now at the precinct level.
19. Would these be like town halls with members of Congress? Meetings should be held at different days/times and in different locations to maximize participation of residents.
20. You do not need a new charter in order to have neighborhood meetings
21. Amherst has far too many meetings! Citizens can attend the Town Council meetings, Planning Board meetings, TAC meetings, etc. etc. etc. and provide their comments and input.
22. Citizen engagement, its size and composition, its meeting frequency, and accessibility is vital. Needs to be well lead.
23. Given current patterns of precinct-by-precinct participation in local elections, some neighborhood meetings will be well-attended, but there will be very little participation in others. Will at-large councilors be required to attend all of them, or none?
24. I like the idea of Neighborhood Meetings, but with Town Meeting precinct membership.
25. I think neighborhood precinct meetings would make Town Meeting even more representative. In this mayoral form, one person is the "decider" and just a few other cronies will express their opinions. I see no true democratic process here.
26. Keeping our form of government close to our neighborhoods and communities will help us transition from our present town meeting government.
27. Many neighborhoods already have formal or informal associations. It would be great to make use of them and include them as a way of learning how people feel. Again, I would hope there would be several council members per precinct/neighborhood; it could be more representative that way. One council member is not enough. Perhaps neighborhoods/precincts could elect representatives like TM currently does and those folks would meet with the council members. Or it could be an open representation like open town meeting, and anyone moved by an issue could show up. Electing council members will be no different than electing select board members if there is no way to tie them into their constituents. I'm trying to find ways to preserve what is precious in New England participatory democracy.
28. Neighborhood meetings -- IF they lead to effective input for elected officials -- can only be a good thing. Precinct councilors should ABSOLUTELY be required to attend them. That is why they are elected -- to represent their precinct.
29. Not a substitution for meaningful public participation. Too much leeway for ignoring public opinion as simply window dressing
30. While I think Neighborhood Meetings are VERY important, and necessary for accountability, I'm hesitant to suggest that they be spelled out in great detail in the

Charter. Councilors may have creative ideas about engaging with the public, and I wouldn't want them to be constrained by a particular format or frequency. Likewise, there shouldn't be such stringent criteria that it becomes burdensome or easy to violate the conditions of the Charter. These Meetings should be normative behaviors on the part of Councilors, and for incumbents, failure to adequately engage with constituents would ideally result in an appropriate consequence on Election Day.

31. I think meetings are great but more fundamentally we need an easy way to communicate with our representative - email, text, facebook, etc. This will likely drive more attendance at a meeting.
32. If the council is larger than 13, not all the councilors would have to be at the neighborhood meeting, but it would be best if all are there.
33. If there is a small council, then the Meetings will not be necessary because it will be easy to access the Councilor. If the council is larger than 13, then the Meetings will be necessary as a mechanism for the Councilors to hear from constituents and being held accountable for decisions. If you write in something like this, you have to support the formation of neighborhood organizations, or only well established groups will get attention
34. If you write in something like this, you have to support the formation of neighborhood organizations, or only well established groups will get attention
35. It seems like they should be suggested but not required. I think it's fair to setup the expectation that someone elected to represent the precinct should hold regular meetings. Perhaps provide them with the tools (e.g. facilities, meeting spaces) to hold such meetings. If they don't want to hold such a meeting, that's OK, but I think it would hurt them when they are looking to be re-elected.
36. It's a nice idea, but I worry that the burden of attending regular neighborhood meetings in addition to the other responsibilities would limit the diversity of people who would have the time to act as Precinct Councilor.
37. Neighborhood meetings should be held at least a few times a year. For topics of interest to multiple neighborhoods, there would be larger forums with general presentations on the topic and then break-out sessions with neighborhood-based groups.
38. Neighborhood meetings will be a good way to encourage civic participation in town, and to ensure that people are being heard. Regular meetings are critical to strong participation, so if we can create a tradition of when meetings take place (e.g. four times a year, in one location, well advertised), then we increase the chances that people will know where to go and how to participate. Also, there should be clear channels of communication set up for constituents so that if they cannot attend a neighborhood meeting, they can still participate in some fashion and have their voices heard.
39. Sounds excellent.
40. This town suffers from single issue politicians, one and done town meeting members who get elected for their own pet project (i.e. two school proposal), and then disappear. We need more consistency, more accountability, voting records of councilors that can be scrutinized by the public
41. Another strong NO. A council member would do this as a political act. It needn't be in the charter.

42. Could keep precincts as now designated and have the councillors elected from those, plus 3 at-large.
43. I like the idea of neighborhood meetings, of course, since any opportunity for voices of citizens to be heard is great. I don't think these meetings, in themselves, are a substitute for citizen power to actually vote on their town budget, bylaws, zoning and borrowing that we have in Town Meeting now.
44. I think the town council member should be required to hold them on a regular basis, to be able to hear from those that they are representing.
45. If there is only one councilor per precinct, the single-precinct neighborhood meetings are more or less useless. Maybe we then want to merge two or three precinct meetings together so I am not stuck with just one council member to talk to.
46. Springfield has Neighborhood Associations that are working well and Councilors typically attend these meetings
47. We don't think the charter should be excessively proscriptive.
48. While getting more civic involvement is important, this by no means takes the place of town meeting and shouldn't be considered in place of town meeting.
49. Who defines the neighborhood? I fear we'd be back to the same issues we deal with our current town meeting members - where and when do you meet to include all voices? parents with young kids, disabled and elderly, 9-5 workers? I also wonder if this would be an added burden for these people on top of lots of town meetings that would only provide a forum for the few, the loud to speak their minds like our current town meeting? Not necessarily to be included in the charter document, but if you're mandating neighborhood meetings, you need to make Amherst owned buildings available and suggest they find ways for reps to connect who can't make the meetings I don't have the answer, but the devil is in the details - where, when how often? are there other ways to connect with all citizens using our technology for those who cannot physically attend? ? Skype conference calls?

Please provide us with any other thoughts you have on Public Forums and Mayoral Updates

Long Answer

45 of 99 Answered (45.5%)

1. Again, I'd hope that any worthwhile mayor would update residents often; but I don't think that should be built into the charter.
2. Again, the more communication, the better. This does take a lot of time though, which is maybe why having a Town Manager is a good idea. Mayor focus on communication with public, TM focus on day-to-day running things.
3. Have the forums be formatted to allow questions and answers/dialogue, and not just a public comment period with no exchange between the Mayor and residents.
4. I tend to be skeptical about forums and the concept of a "state of the town" address being something more than self-serving promotions.
5. I'd say the same for the Town Manager &/or the smaller Select Board. do not take my answers as approval of Mayor, but as an indicator of the relationship between the executive (Town Manager, smaller select board) & town residents
6. Regular public forums should be encouraged, but not required, and especially not required by the town charter.
7. See previous comment
8. Seems like it would be important to have an independent organization like CBO or NYC IBO to offer commentary on the Mayor, otherwise just PR time for mayor.
9. The mayor should be required to attend neighborhood meetings at least once a year in each precinct.
10. This would be a great idea for the Select Board to do. I am always in favor of more opportunities for elected officials to meet with citizens, but again, what is the goal here. To hear citizen concerns? To tell them something? There are many ways to achieve this. But the missing ingredient here is making sure that citizens comments and concerns are addressed -- that is acted upon. Town Meeting is the most effective forum for this, as the past 400+ years show. If the CC's goal is to meet or increase citizen involvement and effectiveness, it needs to demonstrate how many citizen hours currently go into town government and show that these public forums will have actual power to affect decisions. Right now Amherst has well over 240 very active citizens who spend hundreds of hours deciding budgets, bylaws, zoning, etc. Boards and committees and town employees have to come to the volunteer Select Board and Town Meeting for approval. How will Public Forums meet or increase citizen involvement and power in decision-making? And again, where else has this idea been implemented in New England and what are the results? CC needs actual data and evidence.
11. all the options in this category can be added to Town Meeting
12. But this assumes again that I want a mayor to run my life.. too much concentration of power with no checks and balances. Two years is not long enough to learn the job and too much damage can be done while waiting for the next election

13. I think it's important in modern society to be able to communicate via email with the councilors.
14. I would like to have more than one precinct representative - we are way too diverse in my precinct, one councilor cannot represent all people, no matter what they do.
15. It seems like these kinds of requirements are hard to predict in advance and that a good mayor will do so organically as needed.
16. No Mayor No Politicians No pandering to moneyed interests
17. Public forums should NOT be presentations by authorities with a bit time for "comments". They should feature real discourse and discussion.
18. See earlier comments on meetings with the public - they are not binding or useful.
19. The Town Manager can and should do this now with our current Town Meeting model.
20. Well timed public forums and town hall meetings are a plus, vital to informed residents and informed legislature whether under the aegis of a mayor, town manager or department head. John Musante willing gave a State of our Town address to the League; point is our current Town Gov't Act could easily address such addresses and updates. Also, several have been done over the years and broadcast on Amherst Media.
21. Again, as long as public forums and updates lead to effective communication between elected officials and constituents, they are great. But if they are merely opportunities to comply with something in the charter, with little buy-in by either elected officials or residents, then they are pointless. What I would like to know is why the Charter Commission thinks that the interest of the public will be more easily stimulated by this type of outreach, as opposed to what we have now. Has the Commission considered other factors, besides a dissatisfaction with our political landscape, that has led to what seems to be increasing voter apathy in this town?
22. Again, I think the entire proposal of a "mayor" is likely to lead to a highly politicized governance, with all that brings -- power players and eventually varying levels of corruption. The idea of a mayor seems to be to have a strong central bargaining person. That can be done in other ways -- for instance, by allowing a member of the Select Board to have vested negotiating power, or the Town Manager. Select Board or Town Meeting can ratify negotiations.
23. All of these comments refer to mayor, but I'm really not fond of mayor! The charter commission seems divided on this as well. If the commission sticks with mayor/council as it is outline, I probably wouldn't vote to change the charter. I hope there is some compromise and inclusiveness so the the charter commission will come to the public with a more united proposal.
24. It's ridiculous to require a mayor to hold public forums several times a year. What are we afraid of??? An annual state of the town address, held in a public location that people can attend (not just on Amherst Media) is plenty to keep residents updated. Also, a mayor should be required to use local press and other media, like a website, to announce new initiatives and how things are going. We should not try to over-regulate this form of government because we are suspicious of it-- that is just setting us up to fail.
25. Love the idea of Mayoral Updates. Would really like to get a state-of-the-town address to understand the long term vision.
26. More regular forums approximately quarterly much better than Annual state of the city

27. Once a month updates require too much time and energy.
28. Public forums are extremely important. Other topics could include public safety, public health, infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, parks), capital projects, events/celebrations, town/gown collaboration. Topic driven forums that allow interaction with and input from the public are desperately needed. These should be Town Hall style events like those seen on campaigns, with lots of opportunity for the public to ask questions. A State-of-the-Town address seems a bit too Washington, DC inspired. It's not as important to me as an ongoing dialogue.
29. Requiring the mayor to connect with the community seems to be an obvious ask, but is logical.
30. What sort of "town hall happenings" would you require a mayor to update residents about? Also, I'd much rather have a professional manager.
31. I think the 3 public forums as described make sense. The monthly update could be a simple newsletter. And a state of the town address is an excellent idea for keeping everyone informed.
32. Monthly updates can be put on the website.
33. Monthly updates seem unnecessary. The Mayor should be more focused on governing than on reporting on governing.
34. There should be regular communication with Town residents, I just don't want to get into death by a thousand meetings.
35. 1, 2 or 3 meetings should be more than sufficient for the mayor to hold. The Council Members (13 at most, preferably 7 to 9) should be charged with being close to the issues that affect the people they represent and getting that information to the mayor.
36. charter doesn't need to be so prescriptive of mayor's communication frequency
37. I like the idea of accountability for the mayor and information going out to the town on a regular basis, but I don't want to burden the mayor with so much reporting that it distracts from the task of leading and managing the town. Maybe every other month e-news, and either the public forums or the state-of-the-town address.
38. It also would be good for the council to develop a list of goals and priorities each year-along with a short and specific action plan. Reflection and focus and information sharing are all good.
39. Mayoral updates could be as simple as a newsletter
40. up to the mayor...
41. I love the idea of a state-of-the-town annual address. I think the mayor should absolutely hold public meetings on each major specific area (schools, zoning, etc) that they are working on.
42. Mayor should have open office hours each month
43. Putting a requirement for multiple reports in the charter is micromanaging. Let the mayor be a mayor.
44. This whole idea of having a single person to have all these meetings with us seems a bit useless to me (better than nothing but still useless). Any Mayor will do more-or-less what they want to do for 4 years, probably well representing what people with money want to do, and then refer to those who support it. Then ask for help before the next election from their new friends with money.
45. We need to balance the idea of being "in the know" with overly burdening the Mayor and their staff to just report, report, report. This reminds me of when I managed state and federal grants. After awhile, I started to feel like all I did was write reports and I didn't actually get to do the work I wanted to do. I don't need a monthly "what's happening at town hall" mandated. If they

want to do that, great, but if not, there's a vibrant website and people can reach out. Let's not mandate the mayor to death!

46.

Please provide us with any other thoughts you have on Participatory Budgeting.

Long Answer

42 of 99 Answered (42.4%)

1. but not the Cambridge mode...there needs to be public input on all levels of the budget
2. good way to get broader input
3. I am close to "no opinion". But so long as it is a "small portion of the budget" it seems fine and seems like something Amherst would like.
4. I think the Legislative Council of 60 should have a slice of the budget to allocate to projects that come from the neighborhoods. I also think that at least one annual Forum should be devoted to the Budget & to Big Ticket items. (We got side-swiped this time around by not realizing that four Big Ticket items were coming up in the same year.) The participatory budgeting process would need deliberation & refinement.
5. No ballot box stuffing with children's votes..
6. Sounds good--don't know enough yet.
7. The people of this town can't be trusted with major decisions as it pertains to money. There are checks and balances, and then there is sheer lunacy. The school vote is a perfect example--our schools will be in terrible shape and we will all pay higher taxes because a highly vocal minority latched onto an issue and damaged the entire process.
8. This is new to me, but sounds really nice.
9. Voters should be over 16 years. 12 is too young in my opinion.
10. What is the purpose of this? CC proposal ends a government where we currently have citizen control over 100% of town budget, elementary school budget and some control over the regional school committee budget. Where else is this done and why?
11. I think we need to step away from this -- at least for significant projects, and let one individual who can internalize the issues make most of these decisions.
12. I would like to see something other than a 'small portion'. Sure, having right to decide about 0.5% of my taxes will complicate town management, and again, give the sense I have some power, but then management just readjusts the 99.5 percent of their share, to negate whatever the citizens were trying to reach, so a small percent will only complicate things. Think 25% and up, so actual projects can actually be voted into budget.
13. If it's modeled on what Cambridge has done, it sounds to me like a complete waste of effort.
14. Keep the Town Meeting fully in charge of the budget.
15. Let the professional mayor make the decision, and the voters decide on the decisions through the mayoral election process.
16. Not needed.
17. Right now we have several committees that oversee spending budgets and the public can come to their meetings with requests etc. For example, proposals can be submitted for CPA funds. It's unclear how this participatory budgeting compares with what we currently have.

18. Seems to be just for show, not actually effective
19. This is a joke. If we can't get folks to buy a new school, why would we spend funds on trivial projects?
20. This option would help, but Town Meeting can do a more thorough job of this.
21. Don't specify the amount in the Charter
22. Great idea but Amherst's budget is so precarious and our unmet needs are so great, this may be a luxury we cannot afford.
23. I would like to learn more, it sounds great but I wonder what it looks like in reality and do only those with "means" participate?
24. If this allows members of our community who can't vote participate, than yes.
25. I'm not familiar with Participatory Budgeting but the most appealing part of the description provided is the inclusion of residents age 12 - 17!
26. Interesting idea. I like getting people involved, but it seems like it could easily be a huge amount of work for small dollar projects.
27. It seems like a way to ape Town Meeting, to make people feel like they have a voice. Much better to actually have Town Meeting, and have it be a fully open Town Meeting!
28. This can work, within reason and as long as the "winning" budget proposal does not run counter to the town's financial means.
29. This could allow funding for charismatic pet projects, at the expense of fundamental yet unglamorous municipal needs. Also, it would be divisive, pitting advocates for one project against those for another -- for instance, additional Senior Center activities vs. school enrichment programs. A poor way to budget.
30. Would any residents meeting the age criteria be able to vote? I would not want the entire capital appropriation to be determined through participatory budgeting, but a good portion of it could (maybe half or 66%) Projects could also be allocated to receive a capital appropriations based on majority (or super majority) approval of the council. There may be projects that are very important from a town standpoint for promoting equity, access, preservation of town assets and other important town values which would not necessarily get the highest number of votes in a participatory budgeting process. I like idea of having participatory budgeting at least in part because I think it would increase interest in our local government functions and decision making and help people feel as if their voices and opinions matter. With a participatory budgeting process, I would want people to be at least 16 years old to vote, not 12.
31. Between a mayor who'd I like to have final decision, a sixty person council who will never agree on anything, and participatory budgeting, we could guarantee that nothing will be done in town. I foresee Amherst becoming a joke in the future with school ratings dropping and quality of life indicators going down.
32. I am worried that ideas that benefit low-income/minority residents would disproportionately not pass. I would rather place my trust in councilors and a mayor with the budget to ensure that projects which reflect all needs are approved.
33. I think you lose accountability with such a process. I want to be able to hold the leaders and decision makers accountable.
34. more people dilutes the effectiveness of managing a budget.
35. a small proportion is appropriate

36. Citizens will be able to advocate for budget items through their council members. Empower the council, don't undermine their authority.
37. Great idea! Need to give examples of what was funded. (Bike paths? Small parks?) Where will the funds come from?
38. Having 12 year old children vote seems odd - how would you register them to vote? 18 year olds vote for everything else. I wouldn't lower it to 12 - though I would encourage anyone of any age to propose what they believe to be a worthwhile project!
39. How small a proportion of the budget?
40. I don't really get this proposal. It seems like weak beer compared to Town Meeting's current 100% control over the town and elementary school budgets. We have vastly less control over the regional school budget which is voted on and approved by Leverett, Shutesbury and Pelham before our Town Meeting votes on it. Participatory budgeting seems like throwing a bone at citizens to compensate for the loss of this citizen power under the new Charter. I need to hear more about what this would cover.
41. It's a nice way to get kids involved and to do small projects, but should definitely to be the way that most projects are funded.
42. Just don't do it for the amount less then 5-10 percent of the whole budget. I find that humiliating and hypocritical. Thanks.
- 43.
- 44.

Please provide us with any other thoughts you have on Elections.

Long Answer

26 of 99 Answered (26.3%)

1. current method of designated time. designated physical place voting
2. Evaluative voting? Close to rank choice, it is like giving numbers for each candidate between 0 and 10, and whoever has the most numbers gets in.
3. I think it's important to show up in person to vote.
4. I think the process tried out for the first time this year, of "Meet your Candidates" in precinct meetings was a good one. Excellent feedback from those who attended. This should be built into the "running-for-office" process, both for Town-Wide votes (a Town-Wide meeting) and for precinct votes for Legislative Council members (precinct-specific meetings).
5. I'm not opposed to rank-choice voting, but I need more information about its particular virtues.
6. Please allow permanent residents (even if not citizens) to vote in Amherst.
7. RCV is the most simple yet sophisticated system for achieving true democratic majority rule. Don't settle for less!
8. Right now seems premature to talk about elections when it's really unclear what kind of government we are voting for. My responses would change depending on the number of council members and mayor vs. town manager system.
9. The more methods to vote the better. The "other" is online voting, if that were somehow possible.
10. These are all useful options in voting and could certainly be used in voting for TM members.
11. Have early voting at UMass for anyone registered to vote in Amherst
12. I am a big fan of rank choice voting. If rank choice voting is not adopted, I would still support changes to our town elections to have people vote once for each town-wide office. For example, for school committee if there are two seats up for election, each voter would vote for their top choice and then the two candidates with the more number of votes would be elected. I have seen this done elsewhere in the state (such as Somerville) and it worked well. Similarly, I would get rid of the different terms for different candidates running for the same position. Instead of say some School Committee members running for a two-year seat & some for a 3-year seat, all would run for a 3-year seat & then the top voter getter (or getters depending on the number of open seats) would be elected for the longest terms (3-years), and secondary top voter getter(s) would be elected for the shorter terms (2-year). This is how it is done with the Town Meeting elections for the 24-seats per precinct that come up whenever the precincts are redistricted & I think it works well.
13. I am in favor of any and all election procedures that increase participation in elections.
14. I would be open to doing elections 100% by mail (and with rank choice voting) in order to reduce costs.

15. Mail-in balloting is my top choice. It works well in Oregon and Washington (state of).
16. Please hold elections during state and national election years in November. Voting in the spring, as we do now for Town Meeting, suppresses turnout and only those with time and resources will tend to vote at that time.
17. Rank Choice is my preferred. Many other municipalities have instituted it with success, although sometimes the current polling machines aren't capable of tallying the information correctly, requiring hand-counting of votes. Rank Choice voting for Town Meeting members (if we continue to have Limited Town Meeting), along with Select Board and School Committee. We should also be electing the Town Clerk. We also need to redistrict -- the current districts have a significant imbalance of voters in them, and appear to be gerrymandered to contain students primarily in Precinct 4.
18. WE should not be voting for enough people at once ot require rank choice in my opinion
19. While it is generous to provide 10 different voting precincts, if the clerk thinks it is possible, I would suggest we shrink the number of voting sites to save money, especially if we opt for mail in balloting or early voting.
20. align voting date with "normal" voting dates, ie: election day in Nov.
21. Consider holding Town elections during state and federal November elections to increase voter turnout and student involvement. If this is a serious goal of the Charter Commission it makes no sense to hold Town office elections, which are unadvertised, separately during March.
22. I like the one where each candidate is assigned a number between 1 and 10, and whoever has the most point gets the post.
23. I love mail in voting.
24. I think Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is a must. For any office in which more than 2 candidates are on the ballot, RCV is the best way to ensure that the winner has the support of the majority of the voters. I'd like to see this provision written into the charter if at all possible.
25. Rank choice a great way to elect the Council.
- 26.

Any additional thoughts on the current proposed changes to Amherst's government?

Long Answer

52 of 99 Answered (52.5%)

1. A council/manager form of government is preferable for communities our size. It is more efficient, better at long term planning, and more likely to result in a stable fiscal situation.
2. Again, I suggest that the CC go for it. A 5-4 split is fine. Choose a council-mayor system that the 5 in favor are happy with, and put it on the ballot.
3. Charter Commisison needs to provide some hard data to back it's proposals. How many New England towns have a mayor-city council for a \$60 million budget? How well are these towns doing? What kind of diverstiy do they have in their elected officials? How much are these salaries? Who sets the pay? How much does it cost to run for office? What specific improvements result from this form of government? Amherst is a pretty great place compared to many other places. What decisions has its government made poorly and why? Were these poor decisions the result of the people or the structure? CC needs some evidence and data to support its ideas.
4. How would we compensate city council members and the mayor? Would council members hold other jobs? Seems like you should make it a job so its not just the retired and wealthy who can participate.
5. I really like your proposal for Mayor and 13 member council. That is the key, the rest is details. Getting rid of Town Meeting is mandatory. It is simply too large to do a good job. And it is not representative nor accountable. I think the most worrisome detail is the one about whether 1 member per precinct will reduce the likelihood of people of color getting elected as council members. I think you should ask POC what they think. One way to split the difference is have 5 members that cover 2 precincts each, and increase the at-large to 8 members. Not sure if that's a good idea or not. One member per precinct is nice and simple, but on the other hand, a precinct is kind of an arbitrary measure. Thanks for all your hard work on this. A very thoughtful commission!
6. Keep up the good work!
7. Perhaps amending the super majority needed to approve borrowing, debt exclusion overrides, etc?
8. So happy you are moving toward a strong mayor form of government! Thank you for you time and effort.
9. This has been an extremely thoughtful process thus far, and the Charter Commission is to be commended for its incredible work. I would also suggest changing the structure of the Jones Library Board of Trustees to have some of those positions chosen by Council and Mayor.
10. Your proposal has wiped out the core of democratic engagement in Amherst. It will create a pro-development "city" approach that is inappropriate for Amherst. It will eliminate citizen engagement, since there is no power left -- indeed, there is no real separation of powers or balance of powers between the executive (Mayor) & Council of

13. The Council of 13 will come to be considered the Gang of 13. Your analysis of the problems with Town Meeting are, in many cases, traceable back to problems in the executive - and in other cases, easily remedied without throwing out the whole thing. A minimum adjustment must be a Legislative Council of 60
11. Amherst is special as a small New England college town. It will not be improved by the development currently occurring, all of which is more likely to be intensified under a small governmental authority where developers have significant access to those in charge.
12. Appreciative for the hours of selfless work that you have all contributed and advanced thanks for the work you will do in the months ahead!
13. I am already on your list
14. I believe in democracy and for a town like ours, the best form is Selectboard, professional town manager, and 240-member Town Meeting. I will vote against consolidation of power and turning Amherst into a place for politicians who accrue power and become almost impossible to vote out.
15. I think a small council (the 13 members currently proposed) will be unrepresentative (like 24 times less representative) than town meeting currently is. It will be much better pushing through unwanted development, zoning that destroys neighborhoods, and catering to developers and to the rich. Since I am rich, I would like to see ways how I can put my money to use so I am in competition with developers in buying my own representative, before my neighborhood will be redeveloped by Archipelago as a 'luxury' student slum.
16. I think it is imperative that the form of government changes. We can't wait another 10 years to get this done. Compromise is important in making progress.
17. I would prefer to see Town Meeting retained, with improvements made to address the primary concerns about it. I do not believe a Mayor/Council will better represent residents than ourselves and our neighbors representing us.
18. Please let's move to a mayoral system!
19. Thank you for all your hard work! Amherst needs some major changes, and I am excited about what the future holds for Amherst's local government.
20. We are so lucky to still have Twon Meeting. Let's not lose this democratic process at a time when we are losing any remnants of democracy everywhere else!
21. Having a strong Town Manager has worked well for Amherst since 1954. There is NO good reason to discard that, and many reasons not to.
22. I am hoping you get to the citizen committees in town, especially the planning board, the ZBA, etc. Our town government is built on the foundations of many committees. There are some problems with how these seats are filled -- through appointment or election. I really don't see the commission addressing this issue at all so far. The appointed and even some elected committees often do not feel any responsibility to listen to citizens who make suggestions. How can we change this culture so that citizens feel they are heard and so that diverse opinions are represented on committees?
23. I recognize the enormity of the task facing the Commissioners and sincerely appreciate everyone's transparency, work ethic, and passion. Thank You!

24. I strongly support a Mayor and Council form of government, but I would prefer a smaller council, 5-7 members, as per the current Select Board. A smaller number of people work better together, and are more accountable.
25. I would still like to have a solid definition of "accountability." It's been a consistent criticism of Town Meeting by many, but what is meant by that has not been defined in any satisfying way. And I would also like to know why LESS elected officials are MORE representative. Certainly this is so in an autocracy; less people making all the decisions leads to much more efficient consensus. But it leads to other things as well. If indeed the Charter Commission truly wants more people's voices to be heard than they believe are now being heard, rather than a certain vocal portion of the town, then these are questions that need to be addressed in a much better way than has been done up until this point.
26. Thank you all for being so thoughtful about these steps, and for putting such hard work into this Charter Commission!
27. Thank you for this opportunity to provide my thoughts.
28. There is no actual reason Representative Town Meeting doesn't consider itself responsible to engage in Town issues year round or to provide regular access to precinct residents. It has made a conscious decision to not serve these functions, which surprises those learning about our current system. How would any new system avoid those same kinds of choices? I worry about how directive you are trying to be while understanding why you feel compelled to do so.
29. Town Meeting HAS to go!
30. Why are people required to provide their first name & last name on the feedback form? I feel as though they could discourage some people from giving their honest opinions. Research on surveys has demonstrated that when this information is required, survey responses are often less candid than they would be otherwise. If you are asking for this information because you are concerned about people completing the survey multiple times you can still look at survey responses by IP address (can you not?). Also, what is to stop anyone from putting down a name other than their own in the required name fields.
31. A 60-member town council is too large and would just recreate the same problems that the Town Meeting had.
32. A major oversight I see in the commission's work is not realistically dealing with the relationship to the regional school system. The other towns either have to accept that Amherst will dominate the region because our mayor will choose the superintendent of the region and Amherst will have a majority of votes on the school committee -- or you need to move to disband the region entirely. The region accounts for about 25-35% of the town's budget and too much of say over that budget lies with the hilltowns. A new form of government should ensure absolutely that Amherst will control the region and its budget. First, thank you for all the hours you are devoting to this very important public service. I strongly urge you not to conclude that a halfway compromise with a smaller TM is your recommendation. Either eliminate TM (my preference) or keep it. No matter what size TM is, it will never be representative of Amherst's population: people with busy lives or single parents will never find the time for the long, tedious meeting

structure. The town desperately needs attentive, professional government, directly accountable to the voters. Additionally, if a mayoral system is your recommendation, that position must play a major role on the school committee or as the supervisor to the superintendent. The proportion of our budget allocated to the schools makes this an imperative. Thanks again!

33. I am unable to attend tonight's meeting at the Jones Library. But I really want to tell you that I think a 60-member council is a BAD idea. It would have the same problems that the current town meeting has--unrepresentative, unaccountable, and a big waste of time and money. Please ditch this 60-member idea! We voted to form a charter commission in order to solve the town meeting debacle, not perpetuate it!!!

34. I believe we are in agreement that we need to ensure our town government represents the people in our town. I can conceive of two ways to do this: make the government more representative of the town and/or make it easier for the town to engage with and hold the government accountable. I do not think it is possible to have a town government that is representative of the town, whether we have a council of 13 or a town meeting of 250. I say this not in a negative way but as a fact – not everyone in the community has the time, flexibility, energy, and/or interest to volunteer themselves for these positions, and those of us with children or aging parents to care for, transportation challenges, evening jobs, or jobs that require travel are less likely to participate (just to name a few). Further, a person of color or a working parent does not, nor should they be expected to, represent everyone that identifies as such. This was very apparent during the school discussions. We should make every effort to make our town government as diverse as possible, but it would be naïve to assume that we will end up with something representative. The size will not change this in any significant way. In light of that, how can we have a representative government by making it easier for the town to engage with and hold the government accountable? At a minimum, we need to have a clear and easy way to understand who represents us and what their positions are so we can make an informed vote, as well as clear and easy ways to communicate with them once elected. None of this is possible with our current town meeting size. It is impossible to make an informed vote on town meeting members unless you are voting on one issue alone and have been told specifically who supports that issue. All this does is add to the divisiveness of town meeting. In order for me to communicate my thoughts to my town meeting representatives, I needed to call or send a letter by mail to 24 people. This is not sustainable for me with a full-time job and two small children, but I actually don't think it is sustainable for anyone. Recent attempts at addressing these problems, such as the LWV candidate event and the email lists, are commendable but not enough. I want the ability to choose 1 person to represent my precinct. This will allow me to understand their positions, and make sure they understand the needs of the diverse members of our community. This will also make it easier for me to advocate others in my community to participate. When elected, I want the ability to email, facebook, and text this person my thoughts. I want them to keep our precinct informed through these means as well, which will provide much needed transparency. I want to have coffee hours at our precinct café open to anyone who want to talk to them. And in 1-3 years, I want the opportunity to reflect on their

representativeness and vote again. It will still require participation to make it representative, and that will always be an uphill battle. But participation is much easier in this scenario than our current town meeting or a 60-person council. Please, let's not propose something based on the misguided notion that a bigger town government is more representative. It has the opposite effect by making it much more difficult for those they are representing to have our voices heard. A 10 - 13 person council is the right size for our town.

35. I fully support the mayor/council proposal. Town Meeting is overly dominated by a small group that has its own agenda and does not reflect the broader town. We are an increasingly diverse community that deserves a truly representative government that is responsive to the will of all the people who live here.
36. I have worked for many local and state governments for the past 15 years as a Town Planner and, in my experience, a Mayor-small council format is by far the most effective and representative.
37. I think you are doing a great job. Thank you for your hard work! I really like the idea of term limits as well. Each person should, at most serve 10 years in one position, then be forced to allow someone else to take the position.
38. I want to be able to keep track of elected officials, therefore do not want the elected body to be any bigger than the proposed Mayor and 13 member council. Absolutely not a 60 person Council!
39. Town meeting is toxic, ebbs and flows with single issues, creates an environment of multiple factions fighting for limited resources, and no long term managing of priorities can be done. Just think if the schools, the DPW, Jones Library, moving the fire department, all came at the same time?!?!?!? we would go bankrupt, a strong manager/executive with small council is better equipt to prioritize more effectively, instead of small minorities forcing their agendas on the town.
40. Amherst is divided into precincts with VERY different numbers of actual voters; therefore election by precinct will ALWAYS be unfair, giving people in precincts with many UMass (non-voting) population a hugely disproportionate weight in all council (or now Town Meeting) votes.
41. COUNCIL SHOULD NOT BE 60 MEMBERS
42. do not agree with this proposal
43. I absolutely want an option to vote on a mayoral system with 13 or less councilmen. 60 is absurd. It can be a ballot option but I think most voters want a true mayoral system with a manageable (13 or less council option) and we should absolutely have the choice to vote for it.
44. I am glad the Charter Commission is open-minded and looking beyond the narrow mayor-city council model, a model which has not worked well in many cities. Greatly reducing the number of elected officials actively voting on key issues, inherently reduces the voices of citizens and concentrates power into the hands of the few. We need a legislative branch with many people--like Congress, so many people can be heard and participate and exercise real power.
45. I believe prior charters (and charter commissions) failed, because they came back with the same structure we had with the exception of adding a mayor - on top of a town manager, etc. If you make a clean break and propose a Mayor along with a reasonably-sized council, that could be responsive to citizens, I believe the charter would pass. Then we'll really know if that's what Amherst residents want to guide Amherst into the next century.

46. My biggest complaint about Town Meeting is that having lived here 6 years and being very involved in the community I only personally know one town meeting member. In theory town meeting is supposed to be made up of people I know and have access to, but that simply isn't the case. I wish I had time and energy to attend more of town meeting, but the reality is I can't do that. I don't have any clue how to contact my precinct representatives on issues I care about. What I do have time to do is contact one or two elected council members that are publicly identified and accessible. I am grateful to all the Town Meeting members who graciously volunteer their time, but not all of them are able to be fully informed on the issues. A small council would be more publicly accountable and presumably more able to spend time engaging the issues.
47. Please don't create a "mini-town meeting" through a 60 person council--that seems to be the worst of all models.
48. Please reconsider the large town council idea! 60 is too large. Please keep it modest and manageable.
49. Please, please don't go with a council any larger than 13. Yes, it will be a tough sell. We'll need some savvy promotion to get a yes vote.
50. I understand the Commission is really doing the bidding of Amherst for All, which mostly caters to developers. It does that OK, especially after some members got admonishes for not doing it well enough, so we are back at the 13 member council-Mayor prowl. But the Commission still is very divided, and so far haven't articulated clearly what problem of the current government they intend to fix, and how.
51. Thank you for your hard work on the Charter Commission. I'm sure it's not easy and thankless. I'm really happy about the 13 member council.
- 52.