

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE CAPE COD AREA

Presentation to the Charter Review Committee

October, 2013

We're pleased with the work of the charter review committee in outlining both the positives and the problems with alternate suggestions for County structure. Ever since the recommendations of the Special Commission on Governance in 2012, strong positions have been taken by various groups. Your approach gives everyone a chance to think through all the alternate proposals from a fresh start, looking at goals and how to get there.

The challenges facing our regional government are many. They include wastewater, off shore pollution, transportation, land use approaches to sustain and preserve our limited resources, and population changes which affect our economy and require responsive action to build a vibrant layered population which includes children and young people.

These issues require a regional approach, and our county home rule charter was designed to provide the basic structure to make this possible. Our towns give us our strong, meaningful identity, a sense of belonging grounded in our history, and serve us well for local governance. However, the framework to enable all parts of the Cape to tackle necessary action jointly is not now sufficient. Our current structure is diffuse, we need a structure in which government can anticipate and/or discern problems as they arise, seek solutions, and bring us together for decision-making on a timely basis.

To do this we need to develop a structure which will provide clear leadership, responsibility and accountability. Our current government has spread these attributes thinly across too many layers. We believe an increase in the clarity of leadership, responsibility and accountability will lead to a corresponding increase in the effectiveness of government. It would also increase county visibility and citizen understanding of county functions and issues.

At this point we favor a strong executive to give visibility and leadership to the county role in meeting these regional issues. This would supplant the current administrator who responds to policy decisions of the three elected commissioners. We also believe the current structure should be replaced by a single elected Board/Council which represents a broad cross section of Barnstable County. This would give real meaning to the legal standard that gives equal standing to each person's vote, 'One person, One vote". This new body could carry out both policy and budget oversight, combining the functions of the Board of Commissioners and the Assembly of Delegates. The duties of such a merged body require each member to have a broader and more in depth understanding of the issues facing the county.

We believe regional representatives would help foster greater public understanding of regional perspectives and solutions. Such representatives would be in regular contact with their various constituencies. They would be able to both hear their individual concerns and to respond to those concerns with interpretations and solutions that help the constituencies see the benefits of regional approaches while not detracting from any town's uniqueness in terms of its identity.