

Dear Council Members,

As you prepare to discuss proposed Charter changes, we'd love to take time to add context to some of the questions that briefly came up in your discussion at the July meeting. We are happy to elaborate on these or any other issues at your August 6th meeting if you'd find that helpful.

### **Topic 1: Addition of a Chief Climate and Sustainability Officer**

This was an issue Councilor Cannon brought up with potential concerns about how Charter required positions have fared in the past. He is correct that requiring a position in the Charter reduces the Mayor's and Council's flexibility in staffing; in fact, some on our committee initially were skeptical of adding this due to questions about how the role would be different from our current Sustainability Coordinator. However, members of Energize Framingham used data to make a powerful case for this position, noting that it is a position several cities are adding, and that the ability of someone in this position to attract climate-related grants right now make it possible that this position will not only lead critical work, but may largely pay for itself. Structurally a key difference between this position and our current one is that it is envisioned as a position that has authority to **work across departments** so that policy is consistent across departments. Currently, our sustainability coordinator is housed within the Capital Facilities and Management Dept. While we kept details of the position open ended to allow for flexibility; we see this as an important, forward-looking position as climate challenges and the need for a response will only grow in the future. If you'd like more background, here is the statement from [Energize Framingham](#) that shaped a great deal of our work.

### **Topic 2: Changed Timeline for Capital Budget**

This is one of the most important changes we are proposing, one that has the potential to both get projects started faster, and to do them at a lower cost.

As a reminder, we currently develop a Capital Improvement Plan starting in November, but don't fully approve it until we approve the budget in June. This has the effect of delaying both the school and municipal sides of government from bidding projects out and starting work until after that time. This is particularly problematic for the schools, since they can really only do capital projects during the July and August period when school is out.

Our suggestion is to still start this work in November, but approve the Capital plan by the end of February. Importantly, this proposal was suggested and supported by both the School Department and the Department of Public Works. You can see comments [from the DPW here](#) and the School Committee/Department as [part of their larger letter](#).

Councilor King referenced some concerns about how this would work during election years, when council members might be just joining the finance subcommittee as well as the challenge of making fiscal decisions earlier in the year when there is less certainty about state funding. We acknowledged each issue and discussed them during our meetings, but ultimately concluded

the risks are low. In terms of subcommittee, it is unlikely that the majority of the committee turns over at once, and it would behoove any candidate elected in November to follow these discussions in the period between their election and their taking office so they are prepared to discuss. In terms of funding, the capital budget is a relatively small part of our budget and least dependent on state funding. It is our understanding that these projects can be bid “contingent on funding” so that in case of a dramatic reversal of fiscal fortunes from February to June, items could be adjusted if needed.

### **Topic 3: Overall Budget Timeline**

We have made a number of suggestions here based on feedback to the budget process and timeline based on public feedback. As Councilor King noted, we do want the Council to be able to be “nimble”, but we also want to make sure the public has multiple access points both to share ideas and see information as plans are developed.

Here’s are the major points we’ve suggested:

- Holding a joint meeting towards the end of January with the Mayor, Council, School Committee and SIFOC that acted as a “budget kickoff” where the public can share priorities for the upcoming budget.
- Moving the budget submittal date from 60 days before the end of the fiscal year to 120 days to provide more time for people to digest information. In practice, this would move the budget submittal from roughly May 1 to March 1. While there will be less certainty about the state’s fiscal picture in March than May, this is after the Governor’s budget and the House response have typically come out.
- Have the Mayor hold a public hearing where the Mayor can explain their proposed budget to the community (and possibly get feedback on the spot) before it goes to the Council.
- Give the Finance subcommittee an added week to discuss/research issues before making their recommendations to the full council
- Require posting the entire proposed budget in an easily accessed spot when the Mayor submits it AND posting the full approved budget for the year so the public can identify changes and knows how resources are being spent within the year. Such information, especially the approved budget, is sometimes challenging to find now.

We feel these are largely common sense that will allow for more input and better transparency, two goals for governance we all share.

Again, some of us will be in attendance at the August 6 meeting, and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Best,

Adam Blumer, Suze Craighead, and David Miles (Former Chair, Vice Chair, and Clerk for the Charter Review Committee)

