



# City of Kingston Charter Reform

Part One: Establish a Charter Commission

# The Benjamin Center

The Benjamin Center connects local governments, businesses, not-for-profits, and health care agencies with the expertise of the university's staff and faculty. We assist organizations in all aspects of applied research, evaluation and policy development, using and assessing evidence-based practices. Our work provides municipalities, agencies, and businesses with the opportunity to obtain competitive grants, achieve efficiencies, and identify implementable areas for improvement.

The Benjamin Center has particular expertise in assessing the operation and impact of alternative government structures and processes. Our staff employs a diversity of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, including survey research, reinterpretation of secondary data, mapping, the use of focus groups, and the development of in-depth case studies. We assist our partners with the planning and implementation of systematic evaluation to comprehensively measure the efficacy and efficiency of existing and new programs. Our work has been recognized in particular for the accessibility of our reports. Data, observations, and our analysis is presented in easy to read charts, graphs and tables with narratives that enable successful interpretation, evidence sharing, and collaboration.

# Examples - City of Newburgh

In 2010 the City of Newburgh, working in partnership with Pattern for Progress, applied for and was awarded a NYS Department of State High Priority Local Government Efficiency Grant for the purpose of funding a City Charter Revision Study to implement functional consolidation, increase shared services and manage improvements to achieve savings.

The City contracted with Pattern for Progress, Prof. Gerald Benjamin, SUNY New Paltz, and Lester Steinman, former Director of the Municipal Law Resource Center to assist the Commission in their two-fold task: to review and determine whether revisions should be made to the City Charter, and to explore possible consolidation of City services to enhance efficiency and reduce costs.

# Examples: City of Poughkeepsie

The City of Poughkeepsie Charter Review Commission was established to study, review and recommend changes to the City of Poughkeepsie Charter and Administrative Code. The Commission is composed of a total of nine members appointed by the Mayor in consultation with the Common Council. Their role and responsibilities of the Commission include:

- Review the current strong Mayor form of government and its success and challenges since its adoption;
- Study the operations of the City of Poughkeepsie in its full scope;
- Review the myriad responsibilities that the City of Poughkeepsie discharges in the course of its broadly defined duties;
- Determine whether the City of Poughkeepsie Charter and the City of Poughkeepsie Administrative Code shall be amended so as to create a more effective and efficient framework for City government;
- Recommend such amendments as may be necessary to facilitate the delivery of services to the public and to better coordinate the functions between departments and agencies of the City;
- Submit a final report, which shall include Commission's findings, conclusions, and recommendations for appropriate action to the Common Council.

# Example: City of Beacon

In accord with the requirements of the Beacon city charter, and pursuant to a resolution passed by the City Council on July 18, 2016 Mayor Randy Casale appointed a commission to “...review the Charter and to make recommendations to the Mayor and the City Council for revision or amendment.” (§9.04) Commission membership was bipartisan, included people with a range of public and private sector experience and reflected the diversity of the city’s population. Members included: Pamela Barrack (Co- Chair), Agnes Campagnone, William Cornett, Marko Guzijan, Charles Kelly, (Co-Chair), Peter Nocerino, John Rembert, Candi Rivera and Brooke Simmons.

The city retained Gerald Benjamin of the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz to support its work. Legal advice and support was provided by the city’s counsel, Nicholas Ward-Willis and his associate Drew Victoria Gamils. The mayor and City Administrator Anthony Ruggiero attended commission meetings to inform its deliberations.

The mayor convened the commission for its initial meeting on September 15, 2016. A monthly meeting schedule was established, with more frequent meetings as the Commission approached the completion of its work during the first quarter of 2017. An initial presentation of possible recommendations for public consideration and comment occurred on March 8, 2017. This was followed by a presentation of the Commission’s final report at a workshop meeting of the council on March 27, 2016.

# More on...City of Beacon

Under Section 9.04 of the City Charter, the commission's powers are advisory. The role of the commissions is to make recommendations to the Mayor and the City Council, the Commission may not place matters directly on the ballot for approval. At its initial meeting the commission determined that it would make its recommendations in accord with a schedule that would allow the Council to put any recommendations on the ballot that it supported and that require approval by citywide referendum on the 2017 general election day, November 7, 2017.

The commission decided to undertake a comprehensive article-by-article review of the charter. It solicited ideas for charter changes from the city's current and former elected leaders and department heads, in a process coordinated by the city administrator. Gerald Benjamin organized presentations around these proposals for the commission's monthly meetings. The presentations considered the relative merits of the provisions under study in the Beacon charter and compared the City of Beacon's practices to practices adopted by other New York cities of similar size and available political science and public administration research. These presentation materials were provided in advance to commissioners, the mayor and the city administrator and posted to the city website, and are appended to this report. (See <http://www.cityofbeacon.org/Government/crc.htm>, last visited on January 24, 2017)