

Massachusetts House of Representatives Bill Summary

Bill #: H.4795

Title: An Act amending the charter for the town of Groton

Sponsor: Rep. Margaret Scarsdale

Committee: Municipalities and Regional Government

Hearing Date: December 11 to December 18, 2025 written testimony only

Current Law: Chapter 121 of the Acts of 2019 established the current town charter.

Chapter 41 of the Acts of 2022 changed the position of town clerk from elected to appointed, and made several other revisions to the charter.

MGL Chapter 41, Section 97A governs the appointment of police chiefs in cities and towns that accept this section; powers and duties.

MGL Chapter 48, Section 42 governs the establishment of fire departments.

Summary: Section 1 of the bill adds a new provision in the charter by defining the word "Publish" as meaning the posting of a document on the town website and also in a prominent and accessible location, with hard copies being made available upon request. Previously there had been no definition of "publish".

Section 2 deletes the word "spring" from a provision of the charter relating to the publication of a report to voters before each town meeting. The required contents of such reports (recommendations, financial reports, etc.) will apply to every town meeting, not just the spring meeting.

Section 3 deletes a charter provision that currently authorizes the select board to delegate warrant-signing authority to another select board member and the town manager or acting town manager for up to 30 days at a time. Instead, the language simply requires one member of the select board and the town manager to sign all payroll and expense warrants.

Section 4 amends the provision of the charter relating to the select board's appointing authority by removing their ability to appoint the police chief, fire chief and town clerk. Those positions will be appointed by the town manager pursuant to a change made in Section 8 of the bill.

The select board would retain the authority to appoint the town manager, town counsel, zoning board of appeals, board of registrars, conservation commission, council on aging, housing partnership, cultural council and other committees as required by law or a vote of town meeting.

Sections 5, 6 and 7 make minor changes of form to include titles, descriptive terms and a charter section number.

Section 8 rewrites the section of the charter relating to the powers and duties of the town manager by:

- clarifying language so that the town manager has responsibility for managing, supervising and administering all town functions, not just those under the town manager's control;
- authorizing the town manager to appoint and remove the police chief, fire chief and town clerk, provided those appointments are confirmed by the select board within 15 days. Failure to confirm within that time period shall constitute a rejection by the select board of those appointments. The police chief and fire chief would still serve and be subject to applicable state laws.
- clarifies the authority of the town manager to appoint and remove department heads, officers and subordinates, employees and other appointed members of town government for whom no other method of appointment or removal is provided in the charter. Such appointments would be subject to confirmation by the select board within 15 days; and
- deletes outdated language concerning the filling of vacancies in the offices of police chief, fire chief and town clerk, since those positions are appointed by the town manager. Change will clarify the process moving forward. Other existing powers and duties would remain the same.

Sections 9 through 14 of the bill make several stylistic and editorial changes in the charter by deleting references to an assistant assessor (the position being "principal assessor," and changing certain legal references in the charter from 'clause' to 'subsection'. This will align the charter language with the title used in the statute.

Section 15 strikes out section 5.6 of the charter, thereby eliminating the 3-member personnel board, which is appointed by the select board to help manage human resources. The board has not met since 2018 and is no longer required.

Section 16 changes from October 31 to November 30 the deadline for the select board, town manager, department of finance and finance committee to meet to make budget plans for the coming fiscal year, thereby giving them an extra month to prepare and submit the proposed budget.

Section 17 decreases from 3 to 2 the number of locations in town that physical copies of the finance committee report on the proposed budget recommendations shall be made available for the public at least 14 days before the spring town meeting. Copies would still be posted on the town's website at least 14 days before spring town meeting.

Section 18 changes the deadline by which the town manager shall submit a five-year capital improvement plan to the select board and finance committee from December 31 to January 31, thereby giving the town manager an extra month to complete that task.

Notes:

The language in this special legislation was approved as Article 16 at the October 18, 2025 Fall Town Meeting; motion carried by a majority vote.