

Panel's ridicule was inappropriate

Editor of The Register Citizen:

The town of Winchester is revising its charter. Unfortunately, as reported in the Jan. 11 Register Citizen, the Charter Revision Commission inappropriately ridiculed input at a public hearing on Jan. 10 and promoted a misconception regarding the ability of an individual to "grab power."

One preliminary responsibility of the Charter Revision Commission is to solicit and encourage input from the public. Any citizen is entitled to present ideas or comments on the proposed charter and the commission must hold at least two public hearings for this purpose. Undoubtedly, ideas may be good, bad, relevant, ridiculous, acceptable or unacceptable. Commission members may agree or disagree with ideas presented to it, but such input should not be ridiculed.

State law imposes several safeguards on the process: the commission must hold at least two public hearings prior to the submission of a revised charter to the Board of Selectmen; the revisions must be reviewed by the board and accepted. If the board rejects the revision it goes back to the commission for further revision; after the proposed revision is accepted by the board it is then submitted to voters for review and final acceptance. These procedures provide for input from many people on a variety of occasions and so averts a "power grab."

When people are ridiculed, and thereby discouraged from participating in the important process of charter revision, potentially positive input is lost. The revision process was not assisted by the behavior demonstrated by the commission.

Charlene LaVele, Community Lawyer
Winstock