

**CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**January 27, 2022**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Via Webex**  
**Fairfield, CT**

A regular meeting of the Charter Revision Commission was held at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 27, 2022 via Webex.

A recording of this meeting can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44ZcqZtwlSg>

**MINUTES**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bryan Cafferelli-Chair, Chris Brogan-Vice Chair, Jay Gross, Pamela Iacono, John Mitola, John Wynne

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joe DeLong, Executive Director and CEO, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Professor Gary Rose, Sacred Heart University, Professor Gayle Alberda, Fairfield University, Attorney Steve Mednick, Town Attorney James Baldwin, FairTV and members of the public.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Marlene Battista-Secretary

- I. **Call to Order-** Chair Cafferelli called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.
- II. **Roll Call/Pledge of Allegiance-**Recording Secretary Pru O'Brien took the roll call and Chair Cafferelli led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- III. **Approval of Minutes: January 13, 2022 Minutes**  
Commissioner Iacono requested adding content from the discussion regarding the First Selectperson's budget and not the Board of Selectman budget. Having just the First Selectperson's budget would remove the BOS from the budget process and it would go directly to the BOF for review and vote.

Commissioner Wynne moved to approve the minutes as amended. Commissioner Mitola seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The amended minutes are attached hereto and have been posted.

**IV. Town Governance Issues:**

- A. **Keynote: Joe DeLong, Executive Director and CEO, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.** Mr. DeLong started by acknowledging Attorney Mednick's expertise in this field. Mr. DeLong started off by stating that the First Selectperson form of government was very unique to the Northeast. Mr. DeLong explained that "home rule" was established in the 1965 Connecticut Constitution. There is no guidance from the federal government

or the United States Constitution so that the operations of local government were left up to the states. Connecticut operates under “Home Rule” as articulated in Dillon’s Rule, a case from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Connecticut Constitution gives the General Assembly the responsibility for determining what authority shall be possessed by municipalities in the name of “Home Rule.” Connecticut “Home Rule” permits for the establishment of a charter to self govern consistent with the express grant of powers. Mr. DeLong discussed several different forms of government in Connecticut:

- **First Selectman/Board of Selectman - Town Meeting** and the variant used by Fairfield, the **Representative Town Meeting**;
- **Mayor-Council**, where the legislative body is elected, most popular in Urban Communities)
  1. Strong Mayor-Council: All department heads report to the Mayor
  2. Weak Mayor-Council: All department heads report to the Council.
- **Council-Manager**, where the Council appoints a professional manager as CEO of the town.

In the nation the Council/Manager form is quite prevalent followed by Mayor/Council with Selectman/Town Meeting or RTM in single digits. The town meeting and its evolution to RTM finds its original in the ecclesiastical societies which founded most of the New England towns as a way of leaving the “shackles of government” behind.

Mr. DeLong recommended a CCM webinar presented by Bethel First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker for your review, the link follows: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhvw\\_RDFQYU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhvw_RDFQYU)

*Commissioner Brogan* asked about the difference between the governments and their effectiveness. Mr. DeLong indicated that the town meeting may be too random and variable, depending on issue to drive involvement. The representative form of government is good unless you elect representatives who are partisan or ideological. However, complex issues require a CEO who can dig into the issues and explain them to the electorate. If you have strong, dedicated elected officials, in the strong forms of government, they will work very well. They understand the desire of the community. In a Council-Manager form of government, there can be a struggle with the manager to understand political realities and strategies. The managers are good at running communities but many are politically tone deaf or subject to political manipulation..

*Commissioner Mitola* asked if a Town Manager needs to live in their community and how long they usually stay in that position. Mr. DeLong said in a smaller community it would be tough but not unreasonable to ask the Manager to live in the community and allow them a reasonable time, sixty (60) days to relocate. The majority of Town Managers stay until they retire.

*Commissioner Mitola* also asked if the Town Manager reports to the Town Council and if so, how large should the Town Council be. Mr. DeLong said the Managers do report to the Town Council and he wasn’t certain of the sizes of the Councils in CT and would get

a report to the CRC. Attorney Mednick said that most Town Councils have fewer than 20 members.

*Commissioner Iacono* asked how a Town Manager is found. CCM has an Executive Search function and you could advertise with ICMA. Mr. DeLong said that he believes it is easier to fill that position than a Finance Officer and the salary is usually \$150K-\$200K.

*Commissioner Gross* asked about the benefits of hiring a Town Manager, including the skillset a professional would bring to a community. Mr. DeLong that there are benefits in having an elected CEO who was great at politics and a strong administrator, they truly know the needs of the community.

Mr. DeLong also encouraged the Commission to contact him for research or data if needed.

**B. Panel Discussion and Dialogue:** Professors Gary Rose and Gayle Alberda of Sacred Heart and Fairfield Universities, respectively.

1. **Professor Gary Rose** also presented the different models of government in Connecticut. He commented that the **Selectman/Town Meeting** form of government was his preference because it is the closest to our grass roots democracy, but works best in small towns. He pointed out that with a population of over 61,000 residents this form of government is unrealistic in Fairfield. In the **Council/Manager** form of government, the council selects the Town Manager. The Manager is required to attend Council meetings, but doesn't always vote. The Manager will have a professional degree normally, and skilled in Finance. Many residents of those towns don't know who their Town Manager is because he/she was not the choice of the people and does not represent them. It is a less partisan government. The **Mayor/Council** government is his preference for Fairfield. Towns of Wolcott and Hamden are smaller towns that have the Mayor/Council government. The people making policies for the town are very visible and the Mayor is the executive power who is accountable and the Council is the legislative power that is accountable. The **Selectman/RTM** operates in only a handful of towns and mostly in Fairfield County. Professor Rose is concerned that there are 40 members of the RTM as it is too many for a legislative body. A smaller council is more accountable. He reiterated his thought that the Mayor/Council is best for Fairfield.
2. **Professor Gayle Alberda** presented government models and how they work best for community participation. Professor Alberda had questions about having a Town Manager and said her department trains Town Managers, but she sees more of that government in the Midwest. Professor Alberda asked the CRC what outcome they want to see for their town government and what are the goals. The New England town structure is archaic for today's needs. There is also something called an **Adaptive City**, which is a hybrid of different governments to make your own government. It would allow for a chief executive who is allowed certain powers, but also have a legislative body for checks and balances. It would need to be balanced so neither side is too strong. The name of the form of government doesn't matter as much as how much power is given to them. It can be put in the

charter. Responsible and responsive decisions can be made with a smaller RTM. If two people run in each district and 3 at large, it will cut the RTM in half. The town would get better candidates because it would be more competitive elections and larger voter turnout. Think about what role three selectpersons play and if having a Chief Executive would make it more efficient.

*Commissioner Wynne* asked how to improve accountability and how to achieve effectiveness of a Town Manager role.

Professor Rose said Hartford is much larger, but the Mayor has a staff: Chief of Staff and other administrators. Most Mayors don't have the training that a Town Manager has, but he/she brings in staff. Key subordinates within the executive branch would still need to be approved by the Town Council.

*Commissioner Mitola* said Fairfield has had professional department heads and said the Town needs to look into hiring more professional department heads. *Commissioner Wynne* recognizes that many communities have had the political role taking over the management role. The requirements outgrew those individuals but they were working hard so their compensation continued to grow. Mr. Wynne wondered If a community were to bring in the Mayor/Council government and brought in a Chief Officer, would the Mayor be less significant than the COO or Town Manager.

Attorney Mednick stated that under that model, the Mayor would remain the CEO of the community and remain in charge of the Chief Administrator. It would add significant salary, but if you have accountability, you might not need a Chief Administrator.

Professor Alberda said if a town has an unelected chief executive, voter turnout goes down. Professor Alberda suggested the CRC think about what kind of government they would want after no longer serving on a board or committee. What would they want to see as residents?

*Chair Cafferelli* said regardless of the type of leader, it is about power and what types of power would change if the Town went to an alternative form of government.

Professor Alberda said it could adjust budgetary authority, veto power, law making. It could give the legislative body stronger law making responsibilities. She asked where the powers lies now and how they would want to move it.

*Commissioner Iacono* asked what the Professors experiences were with the Selectperson government around the state and asked why would Fairfield want to keep it.

Professor Rose said the reason for a BOS and another legislative body is to keep balance as opposed to singular individuals. He's not in favor of that for Fairfield and thinks a more directive type of leadership is needed.

Professor Alberda said she is not familiar with this form of government but it is very much a New England style government. Professor Alberda feels there are too many people who have ideas and when something is passed through, there is no

accountability. Professor Rose asked why the Charter Revision was being done now and it was explained to him that the state advocates the Charter be reviewed every 10 years. Fairfield's Charter hasn't been reviewed in 15 years. The Strategic Planning Committee had a strong response on whether the Town is managing properly because the Town was going through significant managerial issues.

Professor Alberda is a Fairfield worker and she thinks it is a great town. No need to fix what is not broken, but things can be made better. Keep what is good but also be more accountable and give the next generation a better version of Fairfield.

**C. Background Document #3**

Attorney Mednick referred to this document included in the backup which has data of the different forms of government and the towns that use them as well as population.

**V. CRC Discussion: Budget Article X – Background Document #5 and Article X Redline**

This is a preliminary markup of the budget section. There are not a lot of changes. Attorney Mednick included a reference to the Capital Budget to make it simultaneous with the Operational Budget. Attorney Mednick told the CRC to review Document 5 and let him know if there are any concerns or adjustments. The markups are just for budget provisions and changes in the language to be sure there is clarity as they go through the steps in the process. Tentative terms of "publication" and the role of the BOS vs First Selectperson. Attorney Mednick also would like to explore a condensed timeline for the budget process. The end dates for the budget are centered around the Tax Collector because he needs 30 days to print bills. It doesn't take as long now. Commissioner Mitola commented that a change in government would change the budget process. Commissioner Brogan suggested adding a five year look schedule and a balance report for the Capital Budget projects. Commissioner Iacono suggested looking at Westport's language regarding the Capital Budget and adopting that.

**VI. Next Steps**

The next meeting will have presenters from different forms of government. Attorney Mednick invited representative of Mayor/Council forms of government (at-large/hybrid and district) Council/Manager and First Selectman/woman forms..

**VII. Adjourn**

Commissioner Wynne moved to adjourn. Vice Chair Brogan seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien  
Recording Secretary