

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
February 10, 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, February 10, 2022 via Webex

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

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Bryan Cafferelli, Vice Chair Chris Brogan, Secretary Marlene Battista, Jay Gross, Pamela Iacono, John Mitola, John Wynne

OTHERS PRESENT: Hon. James Pascarella, Scott Shanley, Newtown First Selectman Hon. Dan Rosenthal, Town Manager Enfield Hon. Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, New Britain City Treasurer Hon. Dan Salerno, Branford First Selectman Hon. Jamie Cosgrove, Attorney Steve Mednick, Town Attorney James Baldwin

- I. **CALL TO ORDER-** Chair Bryan Cafferelli called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.
- II. **ROLL CALL-**Recording Secretary Pru O'Brien took the roll call.
- III. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE-** Chair Bryan Cafferelli led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- IV. **Approval of Minutes from January 27, 2022 meeting**
Commissioner Brogan moved to approve the minutes of 1/27/22 as written. Commissioner Iacono seconded the motion.
The motion carried 6-0-1 (Commissioner Battista abstained)
- V. **Town Governance Issues: Representatives of Different Forms of Connecticut Municipal Governments**
 - a. **Mayor/Council: Hamden (Hon. James Pascarella)**
Former Hamden Mayor Pascarella was the Acting Mayor for two months and also served on the Board of Education. Hamden's form of government is Mayor/Council. They call themselves a town, but they are actually a city. Hamden is extraordinarily diverse. They haven't had a Board of Finance since 2008 and they are in the midst of a Charter revision
 - b. **Bristol (Hon. Ellen Zopp-Sassu)**
Hon. Ellen Zopp-Sassu is a former Mayor of Bristol and is now Town Manager of Enfield. Enfield is a Council/Manager form of government. Serving as Mayor, Hon. Zopp-Sassu had 25 Department Heads in her charge, the full budget and was the full-time municipal CEO, as well as ribbon cuttings and making other public appearances. As Town Manager in Enfield, Hon. Zopp-Sassu is in charge of municipal policies, creating a budget, but no political pieces. Enfield has a ceremonial mayor type with an 11 member Town Council and an at-large Council with district representation. They are not compensated and do not have offices at Town Hall. In Bristol there is a 6 member, 5 district Council. They are

a working Council and receive \$10,000.00 each. The Council members have voting roles and also serve as Liaisons to other groups and committees in town.

New Britain (Hon. Dan Salerno)

Hon. Dan Salerno has served in New Britain since 2013. He served 4 years as Majority Leader. Honorable Salerno is now the part-time treasurer in New Britain. New Britain is one of the largest cities in the state. It is densely populated with over 73,000 people in 13.3 square miles. Ultimately, what takes place in a charter revision is there is a variety of problems in a community. In 2013 when he started serving there was a deficit of \$30 million and now eight years later they have a surplus budget. New Britain has been known as the Beirut of politics and recently they had a Republican mayor who ran at age 26 in a predominantly Democratic community. She ran on a RUD caucus which is Republican, Unaffiliated, Democratic Caucus. There are 15 members in the council. Hon. Salerno was Majority Leader but there was no party majority as they believe in bipartisanship and that is still how the city operates. The Board of Finance is appointed by the Mayor who is a Strong Mayor and then approved by the Council. The budget is presented to the Council by the Mayor and the Council will either approve or reject the budget. There is a public hearing process but the Council has the final decision. In his opinion a town cannot present 8 to 10 items to be changed in its Charter because it is too many for the people to vote on and understand. Hon. Salerno feels that if there are too many items in the revision, the public will not show up to vote.

c. RTM: Branford – Hon. Jamie Cosgrove

Branford First Selectman Cosgrove worked for many years for his family construction company. He was on the Branford Board of Selectmen and RTM, transportation committee also. In 1958, the Charter revision went from a Town Meeting form of government to an RTM/Board of Selectmen form of government. The First Selectman has a two year term and the Board of Finance is appointed by the First Selectman. The RTM has 30 members within seven districts. There is Minority Representation on both the Board of Selectmen and the RTM. The RTM has five subcommittees that oversee various aspects of town government. The budget is developed by the First Selectman and Department Heads and then it is presented to the Board of Finance. There are public hearings regarding the budget, deliberations and then they make recommended budget that goes to the RTM. The RTM can cut or add items but they cannot exceed the dollar amount that the Board of Finance approved. The RTM then sends the adopted budget to the Board of Finance to set a Mill Rate. They do not have a referendum. The 30 member body acts as the Town. Any appropriation in excess of \$50,000 has a 15 day hold for Petition to Override.

Commissioner Mitola mentioned that the Branford form of government was similar to Fairfield. They are 30 person RTM that functions in subcommittees. First Selectman Cosgrove said the majority of the subcommittees have seven members. At a full meeting each Chair of a committee updates the full committee. Commissioner Mitola asked if subcommittees are in the charter. First Selectman Cosgrove said they are not in the charter but there is an ordinance and the ordinance has rules for the RTM as well. Commissioner Mitola had a general question for larger towns and legislative bodies and whether or not they have a staff or a budget. Hon. James Pascarella said Hamden's Legislative body doesn't receive salaries or compensation but there is a \$2,000.00 stipend. There are also two FT staffers, the Council Administrator and a Deputy Council Administrator and there is a \$6,000.00 stipend for the clerk. The stenographer attends meetings and the meetings are on video as well. The stenographer is paid.

d. Council/Manager: Manchester – Scott Shanley

Town Manager Shanley suggested looking at Groton's town government. They are a Council/Manager with a 42 member RTM. Mr. Shanley is an advocate for Manager/Council form of government and if done properly, it provides a level of stability. Whatever government is chosen for the town, invest the highest form in a single body for clarity on who makes decisions and who is responsible/accountable. The elected body will make most of the decisions. Policy and Capital Budget making remain a democratic process. Town Manager Shanley does not like the terms strong/weak Mayor.

e. Board of Selectman/Legislative Council: Newtown - First Selectman, Hon. Dan Rosenthal

First Selectman Rosenthal spoke about the history of his current town government which is a Selectman form of government having three members. In 1975 they eliminated the the Board of Finance through the Charter Revision and formed a Legislative of Council. The Council started with 19 members, but since 1980 reduced it to 12. (4 council members per district) They do have minority representation rules and the Council is the Chief Fiscal body for Newtown as well as ordinance makers. There was an interest in bringing back the Board of Finance as an advisory board rather than a voting on budget board. They vote on debt policy and budget growth and not on budget line items. In 2016 the Charter Revision took away the the Town Meeting and any item larger than \$1.5 million is voted on by the town. Board of Education items are voted on separately.

Commissioner Gross asked what the process was to establish spending limits. First Selectman Rosenthal said it is the equivalent of 1-2 mills or \$1.5 million. Commissioner Gross asked what the main benefits are to the type of government they have in Newtown. First Selectman Rosenthal said because of the number of people involved, it's more stable. There are three layers and they are better served with the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Mitola asked if the budget goes to the town of Newtown every year for approval. First Selectman Rosenthal said it does and it has been eight or nine years since the budget failed because spending is controlled. Commissioner Mitola also wanted to know if the Legislative Board had a staff or an office. First Selectman Rosenthal said that questions are asked through the chair of the board. Department head appointments are made by him unless otherwise stated in the charter. Any contract has to go through his Board of Selectmen. The Tax Collector and Tax Assessor go through the Board of Selectmen but the rest of the department heads are elected. First Selectman Rosenthal also said he appoints his own legal counsel that is ratified by his Legislative Council.

Vice Chair Brogan wanted to know why First Selectman Rosenthal was considering moving his government to a Town Manager. First Selectman Rosenthal said it's the political climate. He is the third generation of First Selectman in his family in Newtown. Fairfield County is over reliant on the corporate world. The Selectman terms are two years and the Town Manager can serve to retirement.

Commissioner Iacono wanted to know what the role of the Board of Selectman was in Newtown's government. First selectman Rosenthal said it varies day to day. They are not full-time employees, it is a part time job and there is no compensation. They do land acquisitions, special appropriations and money transfers between departments. The Board of Selectmen is also a check on the First Selectman.

Seeing as there were no additional Commissioners with questions, First Selectman Rosenthal said if anyone thought of something later on, they could email him through the Newtown website.

VI. **Next Steps**

Attorney Mednick will provide framework for discussion with different issues that have been raised. Attorney Mednick advised the Commission to let him know if there is additional information they would like to share.

Commissioner Iacono would like to have this conversation in public but without public comment, so the Commission can get through the framework and then the public can comment at the next meeting.

Attorney Mednick said they can accomplish a lot of restructuring with the Charter revision. The provision permits the Charter Revision Commission to make an explanatory text and it goes to the polling places.

VII. **Adjourn**

Commissioner Iacono motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Battista seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:36pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary