

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
February 24, 2022
7:00 PM
Via Webex
Fairfield, CT

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

DRAFT MINUTES

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Steven Mednick, Town Attorney James Baldwin

I. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Bryan Cafferelli called the meeting to order at 7:02pm.

II. **ROLL CALL**

Recording Secretary Pru O'Brien took the roll call.

III. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Cafferelli led the Pledge of Allegiance.

IV. **Approval of Minutes from February 10, 2022 meeting**

Commissioner Iacono motioned to approve the minutes from February 10, 2022 meeting as written. Commissioner Wynn seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

V. **Commission Working Session and Discussion on Governance Issues**

Attorney Mednick referred to document #6 included in the backup documents for today's meeting. He suggested the Commission ask themselves questions regarding the governance for the Town of Fairfield. Some of the goals listed in the document are from the Strategic Planning Committee report. Attorney Mednick emphasized the need for a realistic goal, whether to keep the same government and change a few things within or to form a different kind of government with the current titles and make a more robust legislative body. Some ideas for the framework:

- first selectwoman
- legislative authority of the RTM,
- composition of the RTM,
- organization of the RTM,
- term of office for elected officials- two years or four years.,
- I. special meetings of RTM convened by the First Selectwoman, members of the RTM, and a presiding officer.

Fairfield has split authority, some from the First Selectwoman and some from the Board of Selectmen. The Charter considers some boards and commissions part of governance, as per the Charter they hire some department heads with the first selectwoman. Chair Cafferelli opened up the discussion.

- Commissioner Mitola said based on what the Commission has heard, he thinks improvements can be made on how the Town currently governs and streamline the government. The Commission needs to be cognizant about the Town's culture and that for the most part, the current government works. An elected chief official, whatever it is called, who has a vision and is elected by the people will work. He is not in favor of a Town Manager or a Town Council. Commissioner Mitola does not want to consolidate power but it does need to improve. He feels professionalism and expertise is needed to help the elected official. The Commission should also focus on appointments and appointments should also be approved by a legislative body. Commissioner Mitola also suggested looking into whether or not there is a need for a Board of Selectmen. Commissioner Mitola said the size of the RTM could be looked into but the Town needs adequate representation. A legislative body needs support in the form of an attorney, maybe as an Assistant Town Attorney because one Attorney can't do the job by his or herself. Commissioner Mitola feels there needs to be an attorney at the RTM meetings. The Board of Finance works well the budget process can cut out the Board of Selectmen but allow them to attend the Board of Finance budget meetings and ask questions. The Capital Budget process and language need to be included in the Charter. There needs to be a zoning official whether elected or appointed and again, the Town Attorney's office should have two attorneys working for the Town within a Town building as other towns have. Commissioner Mitola would also like to see minority representation on both Board of Finance and Board of Education.
- Commissioner Wynne said the Town needs a bigger change in government and that the challenges the Town is facing currently qualify for a change. A mayor, or key elected official, a legislative function, a Town Manager and a Board of Finance are all needed. Components for possible government structure: A mayor or a first selectman would be the key figure and would set long term direction and marketing message of the Town. This person would ensure the longterm desires of the entire town and participate with the legislative body whether the town council or RTM. The legislative body would collaborate with a senior official, on the long term direction that the Town Manager would implement. They would have ultimate budget approval, and representation by district supplemented by at-large representation. It would be more streamlined than the existing legislative function by being smaller and more efficient and have more concentrated experience. The Town Manager would be the chief operating function of the Town, hired by the council with the approval of the senior elected official or the Mayor. They would provide non political objective leadership and management to the Town. They would be credentialed, experienced and have a contract. They would help ensure the long term policies and direction of the Town. They would be they key executive official of the town.
- Commissioner Gross stated the Strategic Planning workshops showed a desire to have significant change in Town government. Commissioner Gross would like to hear from the Town again as they will have to vote for it. His Town Manager would have a professional certification, a CEO model to be less partisan and have greater accountability. This would increase service levels and responses to the public and he/she will be more able to deal with complex issues and there would be less corruption. This person would not be involved as a politician in town operations and so stability increases. A Town Council/Manager/Mayor structure would also work because Fairfield is a small city. A smaller sized government would increase accountability and reduce partisanship, Commissioner Gross is in favor of district alignment for a Town Council and less than 20 members. The Board of Finance would also stay as the structure appeals to the town and gives them a feeling of continuity. Commissioner Gross would suggest fewer members to the Board of Finance.

- Commissioner Iacono said the RTM is too large and it doesn't function as it was originally intended. If made smaller, the Town would be more in tune with who represents them and there would be more approachability and more accountability. Commissioner Iacono thinks there is no need for a Board of Selectmen and those roles can be absorbed by a stronger legislative body. The First Selectperson could make appointments and the Town Council could accept or reject it. A Board of Finance is needed but make it smaller. Commissioner Iacono is not in favor of a Town Manager and understands the structures work well, but not for this part of the Country. She said the elected official can have professionalism by being held accountable.
- Commissioner Battista said a smaller RTM would be held accountable and people would be able to relate to the representation. She is in favor of not having a Board of Selectmen but does think it is necessary to have a somewhat smaller BOF with a less than 6 year term.
- Chair Cafferelli doesn't think an unelected Town Manager would serve the needs of the Town and doesn't think the residents would be in favor. Chair Cafferelli does think that the people supporting the administration should be professional. Make terms for key departments and find out how many department heads are members of a collective bargaining unit. The Town Attorney, CFO and CAO would not be members of a collective bargaining unit but must be appointed and their terms would not be effected by a bargaining unit.
- Vice Chair Brogan thinks the Town government serves us well, but will it take the Town into the future. He also thinks the RTM is good at what it does and that it's important to have a Board of Selectmen to question the First Selectman. Vice Chair Brogan there should be a discussion about who is in charge of the Town Budget. He is in favor of a Town Manager, but thinks it would be hard for the residents to accept.

There was a lengthy discussion with the Commissioners and Attorney Mednick regarding the above comments as 4/3 were leaning toward a Town Manager form of government. A discussion followed regarding language that would be added to the Charter regarding qualifications for certain positions, size of the RTM and accountability within the administration. Attorney Mednick will send drafts out to the CRC that he has done for another town as well as best practice standards for town management.

VI. Report from Counsel on Non-partisan RTM elections

Attorney Mednick covered this earlier in the meeting, non-partisan elections are not permitted in the State of Connecticut. There would have to be a Statute or Special Act giving the community the ability to do so. As of now there is neither.

VII. Next Steps

- Publicize discussion for public input at the next meeting through the First Selectwoman's newsletter, emails and social media.
- Invite the BOS to the next meeting along with the public, or have the Chair and Vice Chair go to the BOS to get feedback on direction of Town governance.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 10 at 7:00pm, which is the same night as the Board of Finance Budget meeting.

Commissioner Iacono motioned to have a special meeting for public comment on Thursday, March 10, 2022 at 6:00pm and keep the regular meeting for the same night at 7:00pm as originally scheduled. Commissioner Battista seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Adjourn

Commissioner Battista motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Iacono seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary