

Town of Fairfield News

6/1/2022 - Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing



CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FINAL PUBLIC HEARING

Thursday, June 2 | 7:00 PM

Board of Education Conference Room | 501 Kings Highway East

Instructions to participate via Web-ex are at the bottom of this email.

I ENCOURAGE OUR CITIZENS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS IMPORTANT PROCESS

Dear Fairfielders,

The Charter Revision Commission has held 22 meetings since their initial public hearing last October discussing the Town Charter, listening to residents, elected officials and Department Heads. They have received just over 100 emails and held three separate public hearings.

In anticipation of the Charter Revision Commission's 4th and final public hearing, below is a summary of the changes they anticipate voting on at their next meeting. I encourage you to take a moment to read through their proposed changes and provide the Commission with your input at the public hearing or by emailing the commission at crc@fairfieldct.org.

Please note, after the Commission votes on the final recommendations, it will come before the Board of Selectpersons for a vote. The law requires the BOS to hold a public hearing prior to action. Our community will have another opportunity to share

their opinions on this issue with the board. After that hearing, the BOS can vote to approve or disapprove of the changes as proposed, or may make recommendations for additional changes, which would then send it back to the Commission for reconsideration. Once the BOS takes a final action, the Charter revisions then will be placed on the ballot for our residents to vote on in November.

CHARTER REVISION SUMMARY PROPOSALS

The Town Charter has been reorganized and indexed into a more user-friendly format.

An entire Chapter on “**Civility**” has been added.

Fairfield retains its current **form of government** with a First Selectperson serving with two other members of the Board of Selectpersons (BOS), Board of Finance (BOF), Representative Town Meeting (RTM), and the entire array of other elected Boards and Commissions. RTM Membership would move from 40 members to 30 members, maintain 10 voting districts, and would add a minority party representation requirement in line with all other Town boards and commissions. This would result in no more than a 2/3 majority of those elected in a specific district being held by a major political party.

Elections for the **Board of Education** will change to provide for voter choice. Under the current charter, in an election where four seats were on the ballot, the two major political parties would only nominate enough people to fill the two seats they are guaranteed to win. In order to allow for more competitive elections, under the new proposal, each party may nominate three candidates, and voters would have the choice to vote for four of the six candidates on the ballot. The fourth seat would be subject to the Board of Education's current minority party representation rule.

The **budget hearing process would** allow the BOS, the BOF, and RTM standing committees, to gather for joint budget hearings with Q&A and a comprehensive dialogue amongst elected officials who vote on the budget. This would reduce repetitive questioning, allow elected officials from all the bodies to hear each other's questions, and will result in a more transparent and easier process for residents to follow. The **budget calendar** will also be adjusted to allow for later start and end dates. This will provide more time for the Town and the Board of Education to receive better estimates on insurance and other financials. This change will also enable, in certain years, for the RTM to conduct final budget deliberations after

the State Legislature approves the state budget. This will provide our Town bodies more timely information on the impact of municipal aid on the Town budget.

A **five-year capital improvement plan** will now be required by Charter. Those project proposals will be incorporated in the operating budget for approval following the same timeline as our current budgeting process.

The monetary and approval thresholds for **contracts** have been updated and revised for efficiencies to reflect the modern economy.

The town employee positions of **Chief of Staff and Town Administrator** is proposed to be codified in the Charter.

Residency requirements for the Police and Fire Chiefs will be updated to reflect widely accepted hiring practices.

Ethics Commission Appointments would now take place in April instead of July to accommodate for an RTM summer recess in July.

A required **“Cooperation” clause** was added to foster a climate of mutual respect between elected and appointed officials and department heads.

The **Constables**, who mainly work with the probate court, are currently elected. For reasons of practicality, they would now be appointed by the Board of Selectpersons.

The requirement for the **Department of Public Works Director** to hold an engineering degree was eliminated in recognition that the Town has had a full time engineering department, with licensed engineers, for many years. It allows for an emphasis for this position to be placed on managerial credentials and project management experience, which is critical to overseeing a large department. This is in keeping with standards from surrounding communities.

The **Parks and Recreation Director** description was updated to reflect Parks Management.

The term of the **Tree Warden** was increased from one year to two years to reflect what is written in state statutes.

The **Director of Health** description was updated to reflect state statutes.

The **Flood Prevention, Climate Resilience and Erosion Control Board** duties and responsibilities were updated to reflect state statutes, also note the new name which adds Climate Resilience.

The **Human Services Commission** duties and responsibilities were updated to use language that emphasizes the need for accessibility rather than the presence of a disability.

The **Library Board of Trustees** section was updated to reflect best practice standards for public library trustees.

The **Town Seal** language was modified to allow for a process to create a new seal that is more representative of the Town of Fairfield's history and unique features. If approved, I look forward to engaging our residents in a community conversation on ideas for a new Town Seal.

To read in detail the entire charter with proposed changes click below:

[Full Document - Proposed Charter Changes](#)

BACKGROUND

Why Should You Get Involved?

The [Town Charter](#) is Fairfield's governing document that outlines our form of government, elections and budget process, and guides us on the duties of elected and appointed officials including key department heads, boards and commissions. Charter revision is the fundamental process by which you can have a say in our democracy on a local level. It happens infrequently, so I hope you will take the time to get involved now.

Background:

Fairfield's government consists of the cooperative effort of over 400 elected and appointed Town officials and board members. The vast majority are volunteers elected or appointed to boards and commissions.

As outlined in the Charter, Fairfield operates with three main branches of government: the Executive branch, composed of the three member Board of Selectpersons, elected every four years, with the First Selectwoman, the highest elected official, acting as the town's

chief executive officer in charge of the administration of all town operations. The town's Legislative branch is the Representative Town Meeting (RTM) composed of 40 members in ten voting districts with four representatives elected per district every two years. Finally, the Board of Finance is charged with overseeing the town's financial interests and policies. Members of the Board of Finance are elected every six years, with staggered terms.

There are dozens of other boards and commissions that oversee areas such as Education, Zoning, Parks & Recreation and Conservation - just to name a few.

While the Town Charter is the key document that allows our municipality to govern our community, the [Town Code](#) details many of the specific regulations that Town officials and Town departments undertake in the Town's daily operations. The Town Charter and all town ordinances, rules and regulations have been approved, adopted, ordained and enacted and are codified and consolidated into titles, chapters and sections in the Town Code.

What's the Process?

The last Charter Revision conducted in the Town of Fairfield was in 2006, 15 years ago, and it is generally recommended that municipalities review their Charter every 10 years.

State Statute governs the process by which a municipality can amend its governing document. For this process, the Town has retained the assistance of Steven Mednick, an attorney who has many years of experience assisting towns with charter revision.

To begin Charter Revision (consistent with state law), the BOS developed a charge for a CRC and appointed a committee of seven qualified members, with equal representation from Democrats and Republicans, and 1 Unaffiliated member. The members of the commission were chosen based on experience and/or a deep understanding of our town government. I want to thank these residents for stepping up to serve on this very important commission:

Bryan Cafferelli, Chair (R)
Chris Brogan, Vice Chair (D)
Marlene Battista (R)
Jay Gross (D)
Pamela Iacono (R)
John Mitola (D)
John Wynne (U)

For the seven member commission, only two appointees were allowed to be members of

an existing municipal board or commission.

Next Steps:

After the commission holds the public hearing, they will hold a final meeting before presenting recommendations to the Board of Selectpersons. The BOS can either accept or reject the recommendations or they can send it back to the commission with questions or revisions. If the BOS has suggested changes, the process continues until the BOS gives final approval.

Ultimately, after the BOS approves the final recommendations, Fairfield residents will have the opportunity to have their say when the items are placed on the November 2022 ballot.

To watch Attorney Mednick's presentation to the Board of Selectmen outlining the process, [watch here](#).



SPECIAL MEETING
Town of Fairfield's
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION



PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION

The Commission encourages the public to share their comments on the final proposals. It's **IMPORTANT** we hear from residents!

This hearing will be conducted in person and also accessible online.

Please join the conversation!
SEE WEBSITE FOR AGENDA & DETAILS
THURSDAY, JUNE 2 | 7:00 PM

WWW.FAIRFIELDCT.ORG/CHARTERREVISIONCOMMISSION



To Make a Public Comment:

Join in person at the Board of Education conference room:

501 Kings Highway East, 295A/B

(Across from Goodwill)

Or participate via Webex meeting as follows:

- Via a web browser: <https://tofit.my.webex.com/meet/online>
- From the Webex app, connect to meeting #: 126 145 0736 #

Or,

- Call 510-338-9438; 126 145 0736 #

Please Note:

Residents can send their comments before or after the meeting to crc@fairfieldct.org. As you would in a public meeting, please include your name and address with your comment. All comments received and verified will be included in the minutes with your name and address. Your email address will be excluded.

To sign up to receive agendas or notifications on future meetings, [click here](#).

MORE INFORMATION:

Current Town Charter

Charter Revision Commission Web Page

Sincerely,



First Selectwoman Brenda L. Kupchick

