

TOWN OF GROTON  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 09, 2017  
TOWN HALL ANNEX—COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:30p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Hauber, Chair Pro Tem Scott Aument, Commissioners Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatsoky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, Darcy Peruzzotti and Jennifer L. White

Absent: Commissioner Brandon Marley

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Dauphinais, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the minutes of the December 19, 2016 meeting.

In response to Chair Pro Tem Aument, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that she would review the tape of the meeting to verify Chair Pro Tem Aument used the term “overstep” on page five, paragraph six, of the minutes.

The motion carried unanimously.

III. CITIZENS’ PETITIONS

Fred Kent, 120 Warren Avenue, Mystic, stated that based upon his professional experience, environment and trends affect one’s business. He stated that Connecticut is losing population, the State revenue shortfall is 133 million dollars, Groton school enrollment is down approximately 20 percent since the year 2000, Groton is facing a mid-year cut of State education aid of almost one percent, the grand list is shrinking, future school funding will be reduced based upon a recent Superior Court decision, Hartford wants to raise taxes on the wealthy which drives people to Florida, federal tax reform may eliminate state and local tax deductions, the 2020 School Plan will add to taxes, and property valuation and house prices are determined by the willingness to pay for the property and other factors. He questioned if new hires for EB will settle in Groton based upon the schools. He stated that planning for the future in the past resulted in a lavish library, one of three, a municipal golf course, a wonderful senior center, and a multi-million dollar giving garden at the former Noank School. He stated that he disagrees with the statement that residents do not know enough about the budget to vote on it. He suggested that the trigger for a referendum be the amount of the increase of Social Security. He questioned if anyone in the private sector is getting a 2.5 percent raise. He stated that the Town Charter should lay the ground work for austerity to reduce the size and cost of Groton government. He stated that budget and mill rate increases must be subject to a referendum. He noted that all taxpayers must be able to vote on the budget. Mr. Kent’s comments have been received for the record.

Michael J. Flynn, President of Groton Long Point Association, 7 Sound Breeze Avenue, Groton Long Point, stated that if a person owns property, then he or she should have the opportunity to vote on taxes. He noted that he appreciates the opportunity to work with everyone.

#### IV. COMMUNICATIONS

- a. Chair Hauber: None.
- b. Pro Tem Aument: None.
- c. Secretary: None.
- d. Members

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she met with Neil Spillane, and she noted that she learned a lot from him.

#### V. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Government Structure
  - a. RTM
  - b. Board of Finance
  - c. Referendum
  - d. Suggestions for Accountability

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Board of Finance in Southington is doing what the Town Council is supposed to be being now, and it takes the budget out of the hands of the Council. She noted that the Manager presents the budget to the Board of Finance, they dig into it with department heads, and then it goes to the Council which has the second vote on it.

Commissioner Mello reviewed the Power Point presentation that he submitted at the December 19, 2016 meeting. The Power Point presentation and the overview have been received for the record. In addition to the information presented from the Town of Southington, he noted that the Cromwell's Board of Finance has a lot of power.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commission Mello stated that the first step in the budget process is the Town Manager prepares the budget and presents it to the Board of Finance. He noted that the Board of Finance works with the Board of Education.

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Commissioner Frink stated that the Director of Finance and the Board of Finance work together.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the estimates of revenue cash receipts and expenditures and the sum necessary to be raised by taxation are being done by the Finance Director.

Commissioner White stated that the Town should run like a business. She stated that she envisions the Board of Finance will challenge the assumptions that are being made. She noted that a two-percent increase year after year is unacceptable. She stated that the pension structure in the Town of Groton should be reviewed. She stated that the Finance Director and the Board of Finance can co-exist. She stated that the Town needs to look for efficiency and it

cannot afford to continue to increase the budget, and the Finance Director and the Board of Finance's functions exist for two different purposes.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Town Charter can be crafted to meet the Town's needs.

Commissioner Peruzzotti questioned the value of the Board of Finance when there is a paid person doing the same job.

Commissioner Frink stated that their jobs are not the same. He stated the finance staff is managing Town resources, being a fiduciary, and ensures the Town complies with regulations. He stated that a Finance Board is a citizen oversight that oversees the finances of the Town.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Boards and Commissions and staff have relationships in every aspect of Town government. She cited land use and zoning as an example, and she noted that Jon Reiner works with the Director of the Planning Commission. She stated that there is no duplication because the roles of the Board of Finance and the Director of Finance are different.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the staff does the financial work now, and she likes the fact that there is professional staff that is doing that work. She stated that it seems like the Board of Finance would be taking power from the Council. She stated that she wants the Council to be the policy setting body, and she does not want an extra body of non-professional people providing policy guidance.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Council has a lot to do and in the scenario he presented the Council would need to approve the budget.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink stated that the Town Council is the policy setting body, and there is no intent on his part to make the Finance Board a policy making body. He stated that the Town Council could have veto power over anything the Board of Finance does.

Commissioners Granatosky and Dauphinais stated that grants and determining which capital projects to fund are policy decisions.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Finance Board, as presented, is a duplicate of the Town Manager.

Commissioner White stated that the Board of Finance should be viewed as a support function for the Town Council. She stated that she does not see the Board of Finance superseding the Town Council; it is an extension and helps the Council.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that a Board of Finance would be what the Commission makes it. He stated that good leaders delegate. He noted that the Council needs help. He stated that delegating some of the budget to a Board of Finance is a road the Town needs to travel. He stated that this would not add to government.

Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher reviewed the results of the Town of Simsbury's recent Charter Revision.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Finance would be a check on the Town Manager and his or her budget. He stated that he views a Board of Finance as a reduced RTM. He noted there would be six members and a six year term. He stated that people would be committed, there are alternates to the Board, terms could be staggered, and he views it as being efficient.

Commissioner Frink stated that the financial report would be analyzed by the Board of Finance. He stated that a typical Town Council candidate does not want to dive into financial reports. He stated that a Board of Finance would look at financial reports and would communicate financial issues to the public.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she values the fact that there are educated people doing the financial work for the Town. She stated that if there is not satisfaction with the work the Town staff is doing, then the Council can fire the Manager, hire somebody else, and the Manager can get rid of the people you feel are not doing the proper job, but she does not feel it is a function of the Charter being flawed.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that recently the Town of Westerly, Rhode Island, went through a Charter revision. She noted that recently there was a Board of Finance, but now the Town is looking for a Director of Finance. She stated that she does not know if it is good for the Town to have a volunteer that may or may not have a financial background to question what the employee for the Town did.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there should be a balance between people who are hired and people who are elected. He stated that for the most part the staff is doing the job. He stated that the RTM is what you make of it as a member, and he feels the RTM has outlived its usefulness. He commended Director Cindy Landry as being helpful when he asked for information.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Town staff's job and a Board of Finance have different jobs. He stated that the Board of Finance would oversee the Town's finances just as the Zoning Commission oversees land use and the Board of Education oversees the education staff.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Council oversees the staff, and the Board of Education oversees the education staff.

Commissioner Frink noted that Commissions work with staff and there would be no stepping on toes; it works in 126 other communities.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that that she does not think there is a concern with department heads, the Director of Finance and her staff, working with elected officials and/or volunteers. She stated that if the concern exists, it is about personalities and not about structure. She stated that Commissioner Frink has taken the issues raised about a Board of Finance and addressed them in his Q and A document.

Commissioner Mello continued the review of the Power Point presentation.

Commissioner Chase stated that it is not that easy to fire somebody who is not doing his or her job. She stated that she agrees with Chair Pro Tem Aument's suggestion of making the Board of Finance work for Groton the way the Commission wants it to. She stated that a Board of Finance is a good check and balance.

Commissioner Frink reviewed the Q & A Board of Finance handout.

Chair Pro Tem stated that he agrees with most of the information in Commissioner Frink's presentation. He stated that people tend to preform and act differently when they know they are being watched, and that is a reason there should be a Board of Finance. He noted that he is not saying there are bad things going on, but this structure will help. He stated that a Board of Finance will help the Council and the citizens and will lead to efficiency.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Board of Finance would be the same function as the Finance Department. She stated that the work is being done, so that means there is a people problem and not a process problem. She stated that revenue cannot be predicted accurately. She noted that the Town has been conservative with revenue projections, and she does not see a Board of Finance doing a better job at making projections than Town staff. She stated that she believes a Board of Finance would step on Town staff, and she wants professionals handling projections and not politicians. She noted that the Council is the policy making body, and grants and fund transfers are policy decisions, and those decisions need to be made not solely on a financial basis. She noted that she wants people looking for the future of the community making decisions. She noted that people abdicating duties is not a Charter problem, it is a people problem. She stated that that a Board of Finance is less representative than the RTM because the RTM guarantees representation for all parts of Town. She questioned if the 2.5 percent is in the Public Act, then do we need to make this drastic change to the Charter. She stated that the Charter should not be changed, but the people should be.

Commissioner White stated that she is concerned about Groton. She stated that there are too many hands in the budget process, and everyone has their own agenda. She stated that Groton needs to look to the future for what is best for the Town. She noted that a group of six or nine dedicated people who understand finance and who look at the Town and identify shortfalls should be considered. She stated that sometimes investing needs to occur in order to get the rewards. She noted that she supports a Board of Finance.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that there cannot be the assumption that there would be an adversarial relationship between Boards and Commissions and Town staff. She stated that a triggered budget referendum includes citizen participation. She stated that the Public Act's 2.5 percent that the State is putting on the towns does not include reductions in revenue, so you need to think about what is going to happen to the mill rate.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that we cannot please everybody, and we will need to compromise. He stated that it is the job of leaders to come up with some kind of consensus. He reminded the Commission that it will have to get through the RTM/Board of Finance/budget referendum by the end of next month.

Commissioner Mello questioned how much additional information would be needed to make a decision about a Board of Finance. He stated that he feels that people have a sense on how they feel about a Board of Finance.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she would like to see a budget calendar and how it might work with a Board of Finance. She stated that she would like to know who would be responsible for giving the Town Manager or the Board of Finance budget guidance in the beginning of the process. She noted that determining what the citizens can bear is a policy decision. She questioned if it is time to consult with an attorney in terms of how a Board of Finance would fit with the notion that the Council is the policy making body even on financial matters. She questioned who gives guidance to the Manager on the budget.

Commissioner Frink stated that budget guidance is a big piece of this, it has not been discussed, and it is a community effort. He noted that goal setting/an intense financial plan would occur every two years.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she has seen the budget process work in Groton for years. She stated that guidance had been given to the Town Manager who was not there to maintain the status quo, but to find creative ways of meeting that number/guidance by reorganizing departments/functions, privatizing. She stated that it is not working now, and it is a people problem not a Charter problem.

Chair Hauber stated that she would like to know how many towns with a Board of Finance have budget referendums.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that there are ways to tighten the language of the Charter that does not change the entire process.

The Commissioners discussed who is responsible for deciding/approving which grants the Town applies for.

Commissioner Frink stated that he did not know where the notion that the RTM is staying is coming from, as the Commission voted against it. He stated that the Public Act does not include arbitration awards and debt. He referenced San Luis Obispo's budget process as the gold standard.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that initial public input should be included in the budget calendar, and she noted that she is looking for goals with action items and measurable outcomes.

Commissioner White suggested reviewing the length of time of the budget process.

Commissioner Dauphinais reviewed the draft language for increased accountability for the Town Council/Town Manager. She noted that there is a lack of accountability to the citizens. She stated that it always comes back to measuring progress against goals, and goals have to be established before the Manager finalizes his or her budget. She noted that the Council has to produce goals with measurable outcomes, budget guidance goes to the Town Manager, and in every budget report the Manager has to review how the last budget met the previous goals.

Commissioner Frink stated that his concern is that staff is developing the budget unaware of the Council's goals.

The Commissioners discussed when Council budget goals could be established.

Commissioner White stated that if the Manager deviates from the goals, he or she needs to explain why.

Commissioner Frink proposed changing "reflecting" to "incorporating" in Section 7.2 and changing "corresponds" to "links" in section 9.1.1. He noted that the budget conversation needs to include staffing.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he believes somebody needs to help the Council.

The Commission discussed having an attorney look at Commissioner Dauphinais' proposed changes to the Charter.

The Commission discussed the form and fit of the recommendations of the Commission and working with an attorney.

Commissioner Granatosky requested Mayor Flax be asked about the desired format of the Commission's results.

Chair Pro Tem Aument clarified the topics for the next agenda:

- RTM
- Board of Finance
- Referendum
- Budget Timeline
- Proposed changes to promote accountability

## VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Chair Hauber, Seconded by Commissioner Chase.

The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:34 p.m.

Attest:

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Scott Aument  
Secretary