

TOWN OF GROTON
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 23, 2017
TOWN HALL ANNEX—COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Hauber called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Commissioners Scott Aument and Brandon Marley

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Granatosky, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais, to approve the minutes of the January 09, 2017 meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

- a. Chair Hauber: None.
- b. Secretary: None.
- c. Members:

Commissioner Mello stated that he had a conversation with a member of the Board of Finance in Haddam, Connecticut. He noted its population is approximately 7,000. He reviewed the budget process for the Town of Haddam.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Mello stated that Haddam does not have a Town Manager, but it has a Finance Director and Selectmen. He noted that there are variations of Boards of Finance and how the budget is ultimately decided.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Mello stated that there is nothing in Haddam's budget process that requires minimum voter turnout for the town meeting. He noted that they convene the following week until the budget is adopted.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she attended the January RTM meeting, and she referenced the Town Manager's report that includes financial information. She noted that the report contains less information than a report that a Finance Board may provide.

Commissioner Frink stated that he attended the Town Council/Board of Education/RTM meeting. He stated that they would have benefited from having a Board of Finance function at the meeting. He noted that he had a brief conversation with Director Cindy Landry about a Board of Finance, and he asked her

if she would like to attend a Commission meeting to get her input on a Board of Finance.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

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

Commissioner Mello reviewed the Power Point presentation for Cromwell's budget process. The presentation has been received for the record. He noted that the Board of Finance meets with the Board of Education and discusses line items in its budget.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the total Board of Education's budget can be reduced, but the Board of Education determines where reductions would be made.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Education has to present its budget to the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that there are minimum budget requirements as well.

Commissioner Marley arrived at 6:45 p.m.

Commissioner Mello stated that the bottom line education budget can be reduced, but budget discussions could include areas where reductions may occur.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that in the past there have been detailed discussions on the Board of Education's budget, but ultimately the Board of Education makes reductions from areas it identifies.

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Finance has the option to take no action on the budget, and there is always a referendum. He noted Cromwell's population is approximately 30,000.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that Cromwell is in DRG D, and Groton is in DRG G. She stated that the referendum could occur every other week if a budget is not approved. She noted that demographics should be considered when determining which type of government structure is appropriate for Groton.

Commissioner Mello noted that the budget process and details could be created to address what best fits for Groton.

Commissioner Frink reviewed the budget timeline he created including a Board of Finance. It is included in the record. He noted that if the Board of Finance passes at the referendum, the RTM would be eliminated. He stated that there would be maximum of three referendums, and

if the third does not pass, the Town Council would set the budget at one dollar less than the target.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Frink stated that there would be public hearings. He stated that goal setting occurs on an election year.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink stated that the Town staff puts the budget together, and if the Town Council approves a budget wherein spending targets are exceeded, then it goes to referendum. He confirmed that if the third referendum fails, then the budget is approved at one dollar less than the target.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that there may be three referendums where the budget is turned down, but the result is a budget where essentially nothing has changed.

Commissioner Frink stated that the budget would not include increases more than the target if the referendums fail. He noted that there are fail safe mechanisms in the budget today, and there is always a budget on July first. He noted that if the referendums do not pass, then it goes back to the 2.5 percent increase, if that is the target.

Commissioner Dauphinais complimented Commissioner Frink on the work he did. She noted that it is awkward to have the workshops, obtaining public input, and doing the two-year budget in the second year of the Council's term.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that there could be a new Council and the Councilors may not know anything at the beginning of the term.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink stated that in the second year of the two-year financial plan there is a new Council.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that the turnaround times for repeated referendums are unrealistic. She stated that if the budget fails, it would be hard for the three bodies to get back to work on the budget, come up with something else, have a ballot printed, and get it to referendum.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that where there is a will there is a way. She noted that Ledyard makes the referendum process work with the same information it receives from the State regarding revenue.

Commissioner Frink reviewed the Simsbury, CT handout. It has been included the record.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance process occurs after the Board of Selectmen approves the budget. He noted that Simsbury will have a Town Manager, a Board of Selectmen, a head Selectman, and a Board of Finance. He stated that a Board of Finance acts as an advisory role, and the Town Council would be the final resource allocators for the Town of Groton.

Commissioner Mello stated that in Haddam, the Board of Finance prepares the budget and monitors the current budget. He noted that the Board of Finance is also involved in the long-range plan for the budget.

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Director of Finance gives a financial report to the Town Council about the budget.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the current Town Manager's report is nothing like what a Board of Finance would do on a monthly basis.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that when the RTM would have Committee meetings, Committee members would ask where the Town is with respect to budget projections. She stated that every month the RTM finds out where we are with fund balance and major expenditures. She noted that by the time budget meetings occur in April, then the information has been ready to go and questions can be asked.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance would have quarterly reports, not monthly reports.

Commissioner White stated that if the Board of Finance was approved, she was envisioning key performance indicators against spending over prior year, and that is how it would be managed; it defines accountability. She stated that the revenues would need to be monitored as well as expenses.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that this year revenues were rescinded from State revenues. She noted that Town staff is collecting information of rescinded State revenues and is talking about areas where cuts would be made. She noted that the budget information could be better communicated to the public and Town Council.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the current Town Manager's communication with respect to the budget is not as detailed as the Board of Finance's report could be.

Commissioner Frink stated that if the RTM goes, there needs to be another elected body, a Board of Finance, for accountability. He noted that the Town Council and Board of Finance should work together.

Commissioner Peruzzotti reviewed the ideas she submitted; they are included in the record. She noted that the Mayor of the City would be on the Town Council. She stated that there would be 14 Councilors: one from each district, six elected at large, and the Mayor of the City. She stated that the chairperson, or Mayor, of the Council would not have voting rights, but the Mayor of the City would. She stated that the Board of Education budget would be separate from the Town budget, and a triggered referendum for the Town and Board of Education would be separate line items on the ballot. She noted that there needs to be better communication with the public through publications and meetings.

Commissioner Mello referenced a meeting he had with Mayor Galbraith where she shared that she was somewhat in favor of collaboration, and she mentioned that the City has problems and it does not always get help from the Town.

Commissioner Frink stated that the current Charter prohibits a member of the governing body of any political subdivision from holding office in Town government. He reviewed a letter from the Mayor of the City dated January 03, 2015 regarding financial independence from the Town. He noted that a citizen cannot be treated with special privileges based upon where he or she lives. He noted that if a citizen lives in the City of Groton, it does not make him or her any different than a citizen who lives elsewhere in Groton.

Commissioner Chase stated that if the Mayor of the City is on the Town Council, then the Town Mayor should have a seat on the City Council.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that when the structure of government is settled, then Council election at large or by district should be revisited, especially if the RTM goes away.

Commissioner Granatosky questioned if the membership in regional organizations would be affected by having the Mayor, or ceremonial head, as a non-voting member of the Council.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the language on accountability accomplishes a lot of what would be accomplished with a Board of Finance. She stated that there may be no harm in having a Board of Finance, but she feels it is redundant with professional staff. She noted that if long-term planning is not being done, it is because it is not being asked for. She noted that she does not think a Board of Finance is necessary. She stated that the check on the professional staff would be the Town Council.

Commissioner Mello noted that the Town Council would need to take a more active role in the budget. He stated that the Town Council has a lot to do, and the financial piece would be with the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance advises the Town Council. He noted that there is a full education staff and there is a Board of Education, and there is a full Parks and Recreation staff and there is a Parks and Recreation Commission. He stated that it is remarkable that there is not a commission working with the Finance department.

Commissioner Marley questioned how a Board of Finance is going to be a Board of accountability when it just gives the Town Council advice. He questioned what the check and balance would be.

In response to Commissioner Marley, Commissioner Frink stated that accountability would be monthly public meetings with citizens' petitions, and the Council and Board of Finance would work together with the Council having the final decision. He noted the check and balance is a 2.5 percent trigger for referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that she agrees with accountability and goal setting and building them into the Charter and directing them toward the Town Council. She stated that she sees spending tied directly to policy; money spent should reflect the direction of where the Town is going. She stated that she does not see the necessity of having the Board of Finance. She noted that there is professional staff, and additional financial reports could be required through language in the Charter.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Finance is another check and balance that oversees the managers. He noted it could be advisory.

Commissioner Kotowski made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais, to approve the proposed accountability language that Commissioner Dauphinais submitted.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Kotowski stated that the proposed changes could apply to whichever structure of government the Commission decides to move forward with.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink reviewed the budget process and role of a Board of Finance. He stated that the Town Council holds workshops with the public and department heads and completes goal setting and a two-year financial plan, then the Town staff develops the budget based on the input, the Board of Finance analyzes the budget and gives it to the Town Council, and then Town Council analyzes the budget.

Commissioner Granatosky amended the motion, seconded by Commissioner Peruzzotti, to include the following under Duties of the Town Manager: the Town Manager shall report on a quarterly basis expenditures, revenues, and fund balance in a setting accessible to the general public.

Commissioner Frink stated that there should be no voting on motions without having them in writing.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the language should not be modified because she was under the impression that the language proposed at the last meeting would be voted on at this meeting.

Commissioner Frink stated that he agrees the Council shall be the policy setting body of the Town. He stated that developing goals within two months after taking office might be too soon. He stated that he agrees with preparing the budget that reflects the Town Council's established goals as a result of the budget workshops. He stated that he does not agree with the proposed language in 9.2 and 9.3 in its current form.

Commissioner Kotowski withdrew her motion. She noted the proposed accountability language had been discussed, and she questioned why everyone agreed at the last meeting to vote on the proposed language at this meeting.

Commissioner White stated that if the Town Manager deviates from the Town Council's budget goals, he or she must explain why for accountability.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she would like her amendment to remain. She noted that the process includes amending language as discussions occur.

Commissioner Frink proposed that the Board of Finance would be voted on at the next meeting. Commissioner Kotowski seconded the proposal.

Commissioner White made a motion to amend, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky, to include in 9.2 that the Town Manager will explain any deviations from the Town Council's stated budget goals. She noted that she would like the explanation from the Manager to be in writing.

Commissioner Frink stated that there was a rule to have anything new submitted 24 hours in advance.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the original language submitted by Commissioner Dauphinais has been around since December. She agreed that if the language is being changed, then it should be voted on at the next meeting.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that the changes are basic and reflect the discussion.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission should do the work at this meeting and vote on it at the next meeting.

Chair Hauber stated that the accountability language and the Board of Finance would be voted on at the next meeting.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that a triggered referendum is a separate topic.

The Commissioners discussed the Board of Finance and the elimination of the RTM.

Commissioner Mello moved to table the motion until the next meeting.

Commissioner Frink stated that when he thinks of accountability, he thinks of a sheriff. He stated that when there is a Town Council and a Board of Finance, then there is a sheriff. He stated that leaving it to the electorate is too little too late.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Town Council holds the Town Manager accountable, and the Council is accountable to voters every two years. She noted that in a budget referendum, when voters are making decisions based on much less knowledge than the RTM/Council/Board of Finance is given, voters make decisions based upon their fields of experience and priorities. She noted that the voters are not accountable for changes that the vote causes unless the items that touch their lives happen to be the ones affected by the budget, and that is a problem.

Commissioner Mello stated that everyone is accountable because they are accountable for the tax increases that they will have to pay and problems with school systems that will show up in the community.

Commissioner Chase stated that it goes back to communication. She noted that voters will vote on what impacts them most. She stated that there should be more information out there so they can vote intelligently.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Groton voters are informed. She noted that of the last seven budget questions, four passed and three did not. She noted that the taxpayers' money is being spent, and the people who are spending the money should be accountable.

Commissioner Frink noted that the voters are informed; they should be given the opportunity to vote on the budget, and with a 2.5 percent budget trigger, a budget referendum would be rare.

Commissioner White noted that a 2.5 percent increase is unsustainable for people who live in Groton.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that to be logically consistent, if you believe in the concept of referendum, if you are that confident in the results of referendum, then there should be a referendum every year without a trigger.

Commissioner Frink stated that he has anecdotal information that 2.5 percent is the tipping point in taxes.

Commissioner Mello stated that a triggered referendum is a compromise between the way things are in government now and the future. He noted that it is important to attract revenue to the community.

Chair Hauber stated that she spoke with Mayor Flax to get the Council's thoughts about continuing discussions regarding referendum. She stated that she would hate to have the Town Council determine it will hold off on the Commission's suggestions with the retirement of the Town Manager.

Commissioner Marley stated that he understands relying on a professional staff, but this past budget season they did a horrible job with the proposed tax increase.

The Commissioners discussed the differences between a Board of Finance and a professional staff as they relate to Groton, the past budget season's proposed tax increases, and how a different form of government could impact the search for a new Town Manager.

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Frink, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky.

Chair Hauber adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Attest:

Scott Aument
Secretary