

TOWN OF GROTON
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
February 27, 2017
TOWN HALL ANNEX—COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Hauber, Commissioners Scott Aument, Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais (via phone), Robert Frink, Patrice Granatsoky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, and Jennifer L. White

Absent: Commissioners Brandon Marley and Darcy Peruzzotti

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Chair Hauber, seconded by Commissioner Mello, to approve the minutes of the February 13, 2017 meeting.

Commissioner Kotowski questioned if page five, paragraph three, should read “four of the last seven referendums passed including the 184,500,000 dollar school project.”

Commissioner Chase questioned if page six, paragraph seven, should read “one person from each district plus two at large.”

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the proposed changes would be checked from the recording of the meeting. He tabled the approval of the minutes until the next meeting.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

a. Chair Hauber: None.

b. Secretary Aument stated that that he received communication from Bob and Kathy Page recommending looking into the non-resident voter issue.

c. Members:

Commissioner Granatosky stated that there was communication from Mrs. Adams.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she received the same communication and there are three people in Ledyard that she speaks with regularly who are interested in this.

Commissioner Marley arrived at 6:35 p.m.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

a. Chapter Nine

b. Definition of Elector

c. Consolidation of Board and Commissions

d. Budget Referendum

Commissioner Frink stated that he would like to review Chapter Nine and vote on the referendum section this evening. He proposed having a Special Meeting Monday, March 06, 2017. In response to Commissioner White, Commissioner Frink stated that the first regular meeting of the month would include public comment.

The Commissioners discussed the possibility of scheduling a Special Meeting next week.

Chair Pro Tem Aument thanked Commissioner Frink for the work he did on the proposed changes to Chapter Nine. He stated that Section 9.3 could be called Budget Guidance. He stated that debt service and capital improvements could be added in Section 9.3.2.2. He stated that "Board of Education" could be added after "Town Manager" in Section 9.4.2. He noted that if there is a referendum, what happens to the budget if it fails should be included.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she questions the wisdom of a two-year budget; she noted the lack of visibility with revenues in a two-year budget. She stated that a Board of Finance should be discussing future labor union contracts and capital projects with the Council and public. She noted that it could be difficult to adjust to a changing environment in the second year. She stated that in an election year it politicizes the process; it is not necessary. She stated that it could be started quickly after the new Council and Board of Finance are sworn in in the second week of November with a briefing for the new Council by the Board of Finance on the financial status of the Town and the outlook for future years. She proposed a timeline for the budget process, and noted that it does not serve anyone to have a nine-month budget process.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that Commissioner Dauphinais has valid points with not having a two-year financial plan with the budget. He stated that the Board of Finance will help the Council be more efficient; he is willing to look at readjusting the timeline.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she does not like the idea of a two-year budget, and there are issues to figure out with respect to finding out what funding the Town will get from the State. She stated that she favors professionally managed finances in the Town of Groton. She stated that everything done in Section 9.3 should be done by the financial paid staff of the Town.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance would not invent numbers or replace Town staff. He stated that the Board of Finance communicates it to the public. He noted the Board of Finance is elected and would be accessible to the public and primarily communicates/formats the financial information. He stated that the Board of Finance works in conjunction with the Town staff in the same way the Board of Education works with the education staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission works with the parks and recreation staff.

Commissioner Mello referenced the Town of Haddam's budget timeline, and noted that the Board of Finance and Selectmen meet at the beginning of the process.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Town staff does good work, and the Board of Finance would be an oversight with the voters' interests in mind without undermining the Town staff.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the language in Section 9.3 needs to be changed to reflect that it is Town staff that provides the status of the budget, the financial risk estimates, and the five-year financial forecast; it should not be coming from politicians.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the language can be changed to reflect that the Board of Finance reviews what the Town staff does.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Town staff provides the facts and the Town Council provides the policy. She stated that the numbers should be coming from the staff.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Town Manager oversees the Town staff and is the conduit between the staff and the Board of Finance.

Commissioner White stated that the Board of Finance would give guidance and the Town staff will develop and work with a budget. She stated that if the Town Council gave a zero-percent increase to the Manager as guidance, and if there is an increase, then it goes back and forth between the Town staff and the Board of Finance before it goes to the Town Council.

In response to Commissioner White, Commissioner Frink stated that the Town Council could meet with various citizens groups and Commissions to determine what the community wants to fund for the next year given the guidance. The Town Council then determines the budget based on the input. The Board of Finance would look at the budget from a financial point of view with recommendations to the Town Council, and then the Town Council makes decisions.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Board of Finance will have bylaws, and Town employees have job descriptions, and everybody will know the part they play. She stated that this is a starting point to begin the conversation.

Commissioner Mello stated that it is important to be careful with language used in the Charter. He noted that there is a need for a Board of Finance section in the Charter that specifically states its responsibilities, powers, and duties.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission needs to vote on the budget referendum piece.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he would be willing to have a twenty-percent voter turnout requirement for a referendum.

The Commissioners discussed how to proceed with working through Chapter Nine.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she had a conversation with the search firm that is looking for the new Town Manager. She stated that it is important for candidates to understand that the Manager is drafting the first budget with staff and presenting it to the non-staff Board of Finance. She stated that it needs to be the Town Manager and the professional staff's budget that goes to the Board of Finance. She stated that everything in Section 9.3 is fact and is the responsibility of the staff.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Commission can determine where the power resides.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that one of the issues depending on the professional staff is that the staff is protecting the status quo to make sure there are no reductions in their departments; the Board of Finance would be another set of eyes on the process.

Commissioner White stated that the Town staff should do the work, but the Board of Finance needs to review and provide guidance.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there was a study done on the Police Department; it was not acted on because nobody had the political will to make the right decisions. He stated that the Board of Finance gives the political will and more oversight and clout to the Town Council. He noted that the Town Council needs help with the budget; this does not change the shift of power.

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to adjust the language in the following Sections:

- 9.3.1: Replace the Board of Finance shall communicate to the Town Manager with the Town Manager shall communicate to the Board of Finance
- 9.3.2: Not later than October 30th the Town Manager shall provide the Town Council and Board of Finance with the following:

Commissioner Granatosky noted that there is still a Board of Finance, but the facts are coming from the Town staff going to the Council and the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that this undermines the Board of Finance as the entity that provides budget guidance to the Town Council.

Commissioner Mello stated that he does not know if it undermines the Board of Finance. He referenced Cromwell's budget process. He noted that the Town Manager creates the budget after meeting with various groups and presents it, with the Town Council, to the Board of Finance.

Commissioner White stated that the Town Council would always have the power, and the Board of Finance is the support function for the Town Council. She noted that it sounds like Cromwell has the reverse.

The Commissioners discussed and illustrated budget information/structure/roles and responsibilities of the Board of Finance, Town Manager, and Town Council.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance is the elected representatives of the Town that oversees the financial operations of it.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Board of Finance would monitor revenues and expenditures and makes sure the Town has a balanced budget.

In response to Commissioner Marley, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance is advisory and is a check and balance on the budget.

Commissioner Marley stated that it is not a check and balance if it does not have teeth. He stated that he agrees with the purpose of the Board of Finance, but the Board of Finance should have teeth and the ability to zero a line item to put the Town Council and Manager in check.

Commissioner Frink stated that he has not found a town that has a Board of Finance with line item veto power. He stated that over time the Town Council could give the Board of Finance more duties by ordinance. He noted that he is reluctant to put too much in the Charter initially because this is a new group.

Commissioner Marley stated that he does not see the Town Council giving away power. He noted that the Town Manager stated that he disregarded the Town Charter and did not get Town Council approval. He stated that he is worried about Groton getting another strong Town Manager who disregards the Charter.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Manager works for the Council, but the Board of Finance could be more critical of him/her because the Board of Finance does not work for the Manager.

Commissioner White stated the Town Council sets the policy and the Board of Finance and the Town Manager/staff works to ensure the budget follows the guidance of the Town Council.

Commissioner Mello reviewed Cromwell's budget process.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that her concern is that the Board of Finance will be setting policy when their goal is a bottom line. She noted that policy should be set by the Town Council.

Commissioner White stated that the Board of Finance should look at the Town strategically and holistically.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Council has the final say; the Board of Finance helps the Council and does not take power from it.

Commissioner Marley stated that if the Town Council has the final say on the budget, then the Board of Finance is advisory and does not have teeth.

Commissioner Chase stated that the Town Council sets the policy and the Board of Finance gets information from the Manager/staff. The staff/Manager and Board of Finance work to develop a budget based on policy set by the Council.

Commissioner Mello noted that in Cromwell, the budget is proposed by the Town Council, the Town Council and departments give it to the Board of Finance, and the Board of Finance takes the budget through the process to referendum.

Commissioner Frink stated that the budget process he envisions has intense public-elected official input. He stated that the Town Council gives that guidance to the staff/Manager, the Manager would arrive at the budget, and the Board of Finance would make recommendations to the Town Council as to where cuts could be made.

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion to table, seconded by Chair Hauber. She stated that she would put the motion in writing before the next meeting.

Commissioner White stated that the Town Council is the body that is elected to have oversight over short and long term planning, and the Board of Finance needs to act on the vision of Groton.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the path of the budget needs to be decided: Town Council-Board of Finance-Referendum or Town Council-Board of Finance-Town Council-Referendum

Commissioner Frink stated that he is comfortable with the Town Council setting policy and allocating resources.

The Commissioners discussed how much power to give the Board of Finance.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, the Commissioners stated how they feel about the Board of Finance (as advisory or having more power/teeth/both):

Commissioner Dauphinais-advisory

Commissioner Marley-teeth

Commissioner Granatosky-advisory

Commissioner Kotowski-both

Commissioner Mello-teeth

Chair Pro Tem Aument-teeth

Commissioner Frink-both

Commissioner Chase-teeth

Chair Hauber-both

The Commissioners discussed which body, the Town Council or the Board of Finance, should be at the end of the budget process with the power to change the budget.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Finance is elected and has a specific role, and he does not see the reluctance in giving it the power to do the job; he does not know why the Council would have to sanction it.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the RTM was at a disadvantage in not getting input on the day-to-day operations of the Town; a Board of Finance would be better served to do it on a frequent basis. He stated that we need to look further at having the Town Council or Board of Finance at the end of the budget process. He noted that the following towns have a Town Council/Board of Finance/Town Manager form of government: Avon, Cromwell, Glastonbury, Southington, Windham, and Windsor.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that it looks like most of the Commissioners want the Board of Finance to have power/teeth.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that a Board of Finance that functions as advisory to the Town Council, that has the time and expertise to dive into the budget in the middle of the process, and that makes recommendations to the Council is the most valuable in our form of Government. She noted that in the past there were subcommittees of the Town Council, and

there was a finance Committee that analyzed the budget; the Town Council does not have subcommittees anymore. She noted that she supports a Board of Finance in the middle of the process that advises the Town Council; however, the policy making Town Council makes the final decision. In response to Chair Pro Tem Aument, she stated that the Town Councilors she has spoken with welcome the advisory role of the Board of Finance as long as the Council has the final say.

The Commissioners discussed items for the next agenda:

- 1-Chapter Nine
- 2-Definition of elector
- 3-Consolidation of boards/commissions
- 4-Budget referendum

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Marley, seconded by Chair Hauber. Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Attest:

Scott Aument
Secretary