

TOWN OF GROTON
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
March 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, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatsoky, Rosanne Kotowski (via phone), Daniel Mello, and Jennifer L. White

Absent: Commissioners Jane Dauphinais, Brandon Marley, and Darcy Peruzzotti

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Chair Hauber, seconded by Commissioner Frink, to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2017 meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

III.

COMMUNICATIONS

- a. Chair Hauber reported that Commissioner Dauphinais will not be able to attend the meeting by phone.
- b. Secretary: None
- c. Members:
Commissioner Frink stated that he sent the Commissioners information on the definition of “stakeholder” according to the Government Finance Officers Association.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Chapter Nine
- b. Definition of Elector
- c. Consolidation of Board and Commissions
- d. Budget Referendum
- e. Budget Timeline

Commissioner Frink reviewed the proposed Budget Process Outline that he created.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that Commissioner Frink’s proposed Budget Process Outline is a good working document. He noted that there may need to be a clause included that would require a 2/3 vote of the Town Council to restore cuts; it gives the Board of Finance teeth.

In response to Commissioner Mello, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance could make adjustments to the budget if quantitative guidance is not met.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that a referendum adds to the budget process; it does not streamline it.

Commissioner White stated that there has not been a decision about a referendum, and she agrees that if there is a referendum, then more has been added to the budget process.

The Commissioners discussed Commissioner Frink's proposed Budget Process Outline.

Commissioner Mello stated that the budget process should be simplified. He noted that the Town Council should set the guidance on the budget, and then the Board of Finance should take the budget, and the process should end with a referendum.

Commissioner White stated that the Board of Finance would help the Town Manager create metric driven reports on the budget, review revenue, and report financial information to the Town.

Commissioner Kotowski referenced Councilor Morton's e-mail. She noted that without a budget referendum, there is no accountability and no incentive to make the hard choices to control spending.

Commissioner White stated that her concern with a referendum is that a strong political action committee may not like something that the Town Council and Board of Finance support; they could push it forward or hold it back.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that giving taxpayers a say in how their hard earned tax dollars are spent is a good thing.

Commissioner Mello stated that everyone has a political agenda; people get involved to deal with issues. He stated that without a referendum, you are not doing justice to representation because the entire budget process is controlled by a small group-the Town Council and Board of Finance.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that historically there have been small political action committees that swayed elections based upon misinformation. She stated that she does not want the budget process politicized.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he is willing to compromise. He noted that there could be a triggered referendum, and that may address Commissioner White's concerns. He stated that there are political factions; that is the right of individual citizens. He stated that we have to look at some kind of budget referendum. He noted that if the Board of Finance does not have teeth, then it will be hard to get people to be on it.

Commissioner White stated that there cannot be a triggered referendum because it will lead to an automatic increase in the budget; it is all or nothing.

Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the proposed Budget Process Outline dated 3/27/2017.

Commissioner Chase stated that she wants accountability and no money wasted.

Commissioner Frink stated that he spoke with Manchester's Town Manager Scott Shanley. He noted that Manchester has referendum by petition of seven percent of electors. He stated that the referendum includes feedback on the budget; fifteen percent of the electors must vote in the referendum for it to count.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the taxpayers should not have to do a lot of work to have a say in their government.

Commissioner Chase stated that any increase in the budget should go to referendum.

Commissioner Mello stated that he does not agree with putting conditions on a referendum. He noted that the people he has spoken with support a referendum. He stated that he does not want the budget to be solely controlled by the Town Council and the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the people she has spoken with do not want referendum; they are concerned the process would be hijacked by a small group of people motivated by self-interests. She noted that they are concerned about the education system and maintaining quality of life in Groton.

Commissioner Mello questioned how a minority could hijack the referendum if the majority has a different opinion.

Commissioner Granatosky referenced an example of misinformation being distributed pertaining to the reauthorization of a bond in the City of Groton; the reauthorization was voted down at the Freeman's meeting based upon false information.

Commissioner Frink stated that he supports recommending some kind of referendum; it could be triggered, petitioned, or Town Council initiated. He noted that he would have a hard time supporting a mandatory referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that there needs to be clarity regarding the budget referendum on the proposed Budget Process Outline.

Commissioner Frink amended the motion, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky, to include: "existence of a budget referendum to be determined" in the proposed Budget Process Outline.

Commissioner Granatosky clarified that the language in the chart is subject to change, and the specific language that will be used in the recommended changes to the Charter will be discussed.

Commissioner Frink moved the question, seconded by Chair Hauber: PASSED

In favor 7 (Chair Hauber, Chair Pro Tem Aument, Chase, Frink, Granatosky, Kotowski, White)
Opposed 1 (Mello)
Abstention 0

Vote on the first amended motion: PASSED

To approve the proposed Budget Process Outline dated 3/27/2017 with the existence of a budget referendum to be determined.

In favor 6 (Chair Hauber, Chair Pro Tem Aument, Chase, Frink, Kotowski, White)

Opposed 2 (Granatosky, Mello)

Abstention 0

Commissioner Granatosky suggested making a decision about the budget referendum.

Commissioner Mello made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Kotowski, to adopt an annual budget referendum for the Town of Groton.

Commissioner Mello stated that he is concerned that without a budget referendum, the public's involvement in the process will be minimized and limited. He stated that he wants an unfettered referendum every year.

Commissioner Frink noted that it is important that people have a voice in government. He stated that the public is involved in the process and informed at the beginning of the budget process. He noted that in the past there was trouble finding candidates to run for local office; the door is open for people to get involved in government.

Commissioner White stated that by adding a referendum, there is more complexity.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Commissioner Kotowski stated that the only way to run for Board of Education, RTM, or Town Council is if you are sponsored by a Town Committee. She noted that she supports a referendum for accountability.

Commissioner Mello stated that people want a say in how to spend their money, and that people should have the right to vote "yes" or "no" on the budget. He stated that if people want to support education, then they will. He noted that some people cannot afford to live here anymore, and they have just as much a right to vote on the budget as a young family that has children who will benefit from the school system; that is the way democracy works.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Town Committees determine who runs for the Town Council/RTM/Board of Finance. He stated that people can vote "yes," "no," or not vote, and if there is no budget referendum, then the option is taken away. He noted that he supports accountability and efficiency.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that you want people who are vested in the community. She stated that people need to be aware of what is happening in Town before they vote; people should understand and study the budget. However, there are few people who look at the budget books. She stated that she hates to see everything driven by the bottom line; sometimes increases are needed. She noted that she is concerned.

Commissioner Chase stated that she agrees that people need to be informed, and there has to be some way to inform the public as to where the budget information is available. She stated that there has to be accountability if the budget is increased; if the increase is more than zero percent, then there should be a referendum.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the budget referendum is another way for citizens to get involved. He noted that other municipalities have done well with controlling spending by having

budget input at the beginning of the budget process. He stated that it takes a lot of time to be informed on the budget; the option to vote on the budget should not be taken away from the public.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that all taxpayers are vested. She noted that the largest block of the people who attend the budget hearing support the Board of Education budget. She stated that Groton voters have a proven record of approving referendums; you should not be afraid of taxpayer participation.

Commissioner Mello stated that a budget process with a Board of Finance and Town Council without a referendum limits the taxpayer's participation in the budget process.

Commissioner Frink stated that he supports a referendum when there is a need. He noted that in this Town, in most years, there has not been a need for one. He referenced two towns that have mandatory referendums, and the budgets passed because the minimum number of voters needed to validate the referendums was not reached.

Commissioner Mello noted that there may be dramatic changes in State funding in the future; he referenced consolidating services.

In response to Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Frink stated that the Town Council could have the requirement of a 2/3 vote to override the Board of Finance in order for it to have teeth. He stated that the Board of Finance is the financial watchdog on the budget to ensure it meets the Council's budget guidance; the Town Council needs all the help on the budget it can get.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Board of Finance will do the heavy lifting and will help streamline the budget process.

Commissioner Mello stated that if the Board of Finance does the heavy lifting, then it should have a say.

The Commissioners discussed where public input would occur in the budget process.

Commissioner Frink noted that if budget guidance is not met, then the Board of Finance will take steps, or make recommendations, to get the budget in line with the Council's guidance.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there needs to be a minimum percentage turnout for a budget referendum. He stated that there are ways to get feedback on the budget through the referendum.

Commissioner White stated that it is important to note the cost of the referendum.

Commissioner Mello stated that he wants more representation and an unfettered referendum.

In response to Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Granatosky stated that the communication problem will not be solved by changing the structure of the government.

Chair Hauber stated that because the RTM has been eliminated, there needs to be something to replace the loss of citizen participation; she supports a referendum.

Commissioner White moved the question, seconded by Commissioner Chase. PASSED

In favor 7 (Hauber, Aument, Chase, Frink, Kotowski, Mello, White)

Opposed 1 (Granatosky)

Abstention 0

Vote on the motion: PASSED

To adopt an annual budget referendum for the Town of Groton.

In favor 6 (Hauber, Aument, Chase, Frink, Kotowski, Mello)

Opposed 2 (Granatosky, White)

Abstention 0

The Commissioners reviewed the term stakeholder.

Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Chase, to approve the Government Finance Officers Association definition of stakeholder to be included in the glossary of the Charter: "The term 'stakeholder' refers to anyone affected by or has a stake in government. This term includes, but is not limited to: citizens, customers, elected officials, management, employees and their representatives (whether unions or other agents), businesses, other governments, and the media."

Commissioner White questioned if the definition is too wide with the inclusion of "customers."

Commissioner Granatosky amended the motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to the following stakeholder definition:

"The term 'stakeholder' refers to anyone affected by or has a stake in government. This term includes, but is not limited to: citizens, elected officials, management, employees and their representatives (whether unions or other agents)."

Commissioner Frink noted that a customer could be somebody who uses the Senior Center, and the media communicates what happens at meetings.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink clarified that the subdivisions are included in the budget process.

Commissioner Granatosky made a second amendment to the motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to the following definition of stakeholder: "The term 'stakeholder' refers to anyone affected by or has a stake in Town of Groton government. This term includes: citizens, elected officials, management, employees and their representatives (whether unions or other agents)."

Commissioner Frink stated that it is dangerous to think that we are smarter than the Government Finance Officers Association. He referred to the Government Finance Officers Association explanation of the term stakeholder.

Commissioner Chase stated that the Commission can create its own definition. She noted that her definition of stakeholder includes: "the terms stakeholder refers to any elector affected by, or has a stake in, Town of Groton government."

Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that he would consider including non-resident homeowners who pay more than 1,000 dollars in taxes.

Commissioner Granatosky moved the question on the second amended motion, seconded by Chair Hauber. PASSED Unanimously

Vote on the second amended motion: PASSED

"The term 'stakeholder' refers to anyone affected by or has a stake in Town of Groton government. This term includes: citizens, elected officials, management, employees and their representatives (whether unions or other agents)."

In Favor 4 (Hauber, White, Mello, Granatosky)

Opposed 3 (Chase, Frink, Aument)

Abstained 1 (Kotowski)

V. ADJOURMENT

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mello. Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Attest:

Scott Aument, Secretary