

TOWN OF GROTON  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
April 10, 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 Dee Hauber, Chair Pro Tem Scott Aument, Commissioners Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, and Darcy Peruzzotti.

Members Absent: Commissioners Brandon Marley and Jennifer White

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Chair Hauber, seconded by Commissioner Kotowski, to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2017 meeting.

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

Abstained 2: (Dauphinais and Peruzzotti)

III. CITIZENS' PETITIONS:

Peggy Adams, 30 Circle Avenue, Groton, confirmed that the Commissioners received correspondence from Gayle Jospa. She stated that she supports allowing non-resident taxpayers to vote in referendum. She read correspondence from Tim and Sue Shepard.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS:

a. Chair Hauber: None.

b. Secretary: Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that he had received e-mailed correspondence from people at 41 Bridge Street, Groton.

c. Members:

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Ms. Adams had inquired about non-resident property owners who own property in Groton and live in the Town of Ledyard.

Commissioner Frink noted that he updated and distributed the proposed Budget Process Outline.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Chapter Nine

b. Definition of Elector

c. Consolidation of Boards and Commissions

Commissioner Frink reviewed the proposed Budget Development Timeline Power Point presentation that he created for this meeting.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the goals should not be a part of the budget process; they should be established prior to discussions of the budget. She noted that policy needs to be set first.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink agreed that budget goals and performance measures should be set before the budget workshops.

Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that the Commission's priority has been focusing on the budget.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink stated that the Town Manager presents the budget to the Board of Finance. He stated that the Town Manager would make a presentation to the Board of Finance, and then the Board of Finance would make a presentation to the Town Council.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that she would like to be a part of the discussion of, and hear the rationale on, the budget referendum vote.

Commissioner Mello stated that when the decision was made to put the Town Council at the end of the budget process to okay the budget, he said no. He noted that in his mind, the Board of Finance should carry the budget through the process similar to the RTM. He stated that he wants the public to have a say in the budget; it is more democratic.

Commissioner Frink noted that he looked at representation. He stated that if there are fifteen elected people, nine Town Councilors, six Board of Education members, with an expected population of 38,000 people in Groton in 2020, there would be one representative for every 2,545 people, which is within the bell-curve of peer communities.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he wanted the Board of Finance to be at the end of the process, and his vote for a referendum was a compromise if the Town Council was going to be at the end of the budget process. He stated that a way to give the Board of Finance teeth would be to require a 2/3 vote of the Council to change what the Board of Finance does with the budget. He stated that he would like to see the Board of Finance examine the budget in detail, and then the Town Council would act as a check on the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Mello stated that a budget process with just a Board of Finance and Town Council would be disastrous because representation has been taken away with no RTM.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance and Town Council have public hearings; the Town Council is the policy setting body.

In response to Commissioner Mello, Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance could cut or add to the Board of Education's budget if it follows budget guidance.

Commissioner Granatosky questioned what would happen if there was a Town Council and a Board of Finance from opposing political parties with differing views on the Town's finances.

Commissioner Frink noted that many boards of finance are non-partisan.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that when she approved the idea of the Board of Finance, she thought the Town Manager would present the Town budget, the Superintendent would present the school budget, and the subdivisions would present the subdivisions' budgets to both the Town Council and the Board of Finance. The Board of Finance would have been involved with the Town Manger and department heads and then would make recommendations to the Town Council; not change the budget. She noted that the Board of Finance would be advisory and make recommendations; the Town Council would make the final approval of the budget because it sets budget goals and strategies.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Kotowski stated the only difference is that the Board of Finance would be more than advisory. She stated that with a 2/3 vote, the Town Council could undo what the Board of Finance does.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that there has been no streamlining here. She noted that now this is a laborious four-step budget process.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the good thing is revenues are being monitored and there is public participation at the end.

Commissioner Frink stated that if the Commission recommends an unfettered budget referendum to the Town Council, he does not know if it would get to a ballot. He stated that a better chance to have a referendum is with a trigger or by petition.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that if there is a triggered referendum, then spending will always be to the trigger; it will not be reduced. Regarding a referendum by petition, she stated that voters should not have to work to have input in the government.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Commission should not re-deliberate the budget referendum; it was voted on.

Commissioner Chase stated that if the Town Council is at the end of the process, it should approve the budget based upon if its guidance was followed.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Commission is bound by procedures that it has to follow. He noted that the Commission is running out of time, and there are several other things the Commission needs to get to.

Commissioner Dauphinais questioned if this was the end of the discussion on the referendum unless somebody from the prevailing side brings it up for discussion.

Town Clerk Moukawsher noted that according to Parliamentary procedure, a person on the prevailing side of the referendum vote could bring-up the issue at this meeting with specific reasons.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commission Dauphinais stated that her concerns are with a mandatory, unfettered referendum where there could be a small group of people with a singular interest voting in the referendum. She noted that when it comes to the budget, a deliberative process is better than a political campaign.

Commissioner Kotowski questioned if Commissioner Dauphinais was concerned when every year the Board of Education employees come out and support the Board of Education budget; that is single group of people with a certain agenda.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she is not concerned because she knows that there is a deliberative process that will take place by the Council and RTM; they listen to people from the education community and concerned taxpayers.

Commissioner Mello stated that sometimes you have to let go and trust the will of the people.

Commissioner Peruzzotti questioned if the Commissioners discussed how many times a budget referendum occurs if it fails; she is looking at the cost of the referendum.

Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that this is a topic the Commission can discuss. He reviewed the vote on the budget referendum from the last meeting.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the following proposed language in Section 9.4.1.2:

“In preparing the annual budget guidance the Town Council will conduct strategic planning sessions involving Town staff and stakeholders from the community. The Town Council will hold at least one public hearing and may hold one or more budget workshops. The dates of such public hearings and budget workshops will be scheduled in accordance with Section 9.3.”

The Commissioners discussed including specific dates in the proposed language as reflected in the Budget Process Outline.

Commissioner Peruzzotti noted that she believes the Budget Process Outline should be included in the Charter to visualize the budget process.

**Vote on the motion: PASSED**

Section 9.4.1.2: “In preparing the annual budget guidance the Town Council will conduct strategic planning sessions involving Town staff and stakeholders from the community. The Town Council will hold at least one public hearing and may hold one or more budget workshops. The dates of such public hearings and budget workshops will be scheduled in accordance with Section 9.3.”

In Favor: 8 (Hauber, Aument, Chase, Dauphinais, Frink, Granatosky, Kotowski, Mello)

Against: 0

Abstaining: 1 (Peruzzotti)

Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Kotowski, to approve the following proposed language in 9.4.1.3: “Members of the Board of Education and Subdivisions may participate in the Town Council budget planning sessions at their discretion.”

Commissioner Granatosky amended the motion, seconded by Commissioner Frink, to the following language in 9.4.1.3: “Members of the Board of Education and Subdivisions ~~may~~ shall participate in the Town Council budget planning sessions at their discretion.”

Commissioner Granatosky noted that the subdivisions need to be at the budget planning sessions.

The Commissioners discussed “shall” versus “may.”

Commissioner Granatosky noted that the subdivisions were not included in the stakeholder definition; they should be at the budget planning sessions.

Commissioner Frink noted that the Board of Education should be in the budget workshops and should be directed by people other than those on the Board of Education. He noted that the subdivisions could be aware of the budget guidance, but he does not know if it can be forced on the City of Groton; it is a workshop.

Commissioner Granatosky withdrew the amendment; Commissioner Frink withdrew the second.

Commissioner Granatosky amended the motion, seconded by Commissioner Mello, to reflect the following language: “Members of the Board of Education and Subdivisions ~~may~~ shall participate in the Town Council budget planning sessions ~~at their discretion~~.”

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Commissioner Frink stated that the workshops would be by discipline.

**Vote on the amended motion for proposed language of 9.4.1.3: PASSED**

“Members of the Board of Education and Subdivisions ~~may~~ shall participate in the Town Council budget planning sessions ~~at their discretion~~.”

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

Opposed 2: (Peruzzotti, Dauphinais)

Abstain 0

Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the proposed language in Section 9.4.1.4: “No later than November 20<sup>th</sup> the Board of Finance will

assemble, from Town staff and other sources, and provide to the Town Council data on the current fiscal status of the Town and a forecast of pertinent financial indicators as well as their opinions on each.”

Commissioner Granatosky amended the motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to the following proposed language in Section 9.4.1.4: “No later than November 20<sup>th</sup> the Town staff Board of Finance will assemble, ~~from Town staff and other sources~~, and provide to the Board of Finance and Town Council data on the current fiscal status of the Town and a forecast of pertinent financial indicators as well as their opinions on each.”

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Board of Finance will work regularly with Finance Department staff; there is no need to change the original proposed language.

Commissioner Frink noted that his intent is to have as much elected participation as possible; wearing it away goes down the path of abdicating legislative power back to the staff. He stated that the Town staff would work with the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that Town staff should be providing facts; you need a basis in reality from which to work. She stated that people need to present the numbers and then politicians can take it over. She noted that if the Board of Finance has an agenda, the numbers could be spun in whichever way it wants to spin them; numbers should be presented without an agenda.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she agrees with Commissioner Granatosky. She noted that this is the time in the budget process when you want to hear from staff; it is important to have the staff do this.

Commissioner Frink noted that the Board of Finance is elected and should faithfully perform its job. He stated that in his research he has not seen a Board of Finance that has had an agenda. He noted that it is wrong to assume the Town staff does not have an agenda. He stated that citizens can be trusted.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there can be agendas on both sides. He noted that he is inclined to leave the original language.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she agrees with Commissioner Granatosky. She noted that the background of an individual who serves on the Board of Finance is not certain, whereas a Director of Finance has degrees and a background in finance.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Board of Finance should lead the way-not the staff.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Town staff should publically present financial information at the beginning of the process.

Chair Hauber stated that she would have been thrilled with input from the Town staff when she was Mayor. She noted that she supports Commissioner Granatosky’s amendment.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that according to the original proposed language, when the Board of Finance presents the financial information to the Town Council, the Town staff will be with it; commissions work with Town staff.

**Commissioner Mello moved the question, seconded by Chair Hauber.**

Vote on moving the question: PASSED unanimously

**Vote on the amended motion proposed language 9.4.1.4: FAILED**

“No later than November 20<sup>th</sup> the ~~Town staff~~ Board of Finance will assemble, ~~from Town staff and other sources~~, and provide to the Board of Finance and Town Council data on the current fiscal status of the Town and a forecast of pertinent financial indicators as well as their opinions on each.”

In favor 4: (Hauber, Dauphinais, Granatosky, Peruzzotti)

Opposed 5: (Aument, Chase, Frink, Kotowski, Mello)

**Vote on the motion proposed language Sec. 9.4.1.4: PASSED**

“No later than November 20<sup>th</sup> the Board of Finance will assemble, from Town staff and other sources, and provide to the Town Council data on the current fiscal status of the Town and a forecast of pertinent financial indicators as well as their opinions on each.”

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

Opposed 3: (Dauphinais, Granatosky, Peruzzotti)

Commissioner Frink referenced proposed Section 9.5. He reviewed the Budget Process Outline. He proposed changing February 28<sup>th</sup> to February 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Commissioners discussed the need to include a specific date in proposed Section 9.5.1

**Commissioner Frink made a motion, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the proposed language of Section 9.5.1: Passed Unanimously**

“Based on the Council guidance ~~from the strategic planning sessions~~ and on a date set by the Town Manager but not later than February 1 ~~February 28~~ January 7 of each year, each department, office, board, commission, committee and agency of the town, excepting the Superintendent of Schools, shall submit to the Town Manager, in such form as the Town Manager may prescribe, its estimates of receipts and expenditures, including capital projects, for the ensuing fiscal year and projections for the following fiscal year. Each such department, office, board, commission, committee and agency shall be entitled to an opportunity to be heard by the Town Manager with respect to these estimates.”

Chair Aument reviewed the topics for the next meeting.

-Definition of Elector-Commissioner Kotowski stated that she wanted to vote on this item at the next meeting, consolidation of boards/commissions, chapter nine.

## VI. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Hauber made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mello. Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.