

TOWN OF GROTON
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
August 8, 2016
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Town Clerk Moukawsher called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

Commissioner Mello nominated Commissioner Aument as Chair Pro Tem, seconded by Commissioner Frink. Commissioner Aument was elected Chair Pro Tem by a unanimous vote of 7-0-0.

I. ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Chair Pro Tem Aument, Commissioners Kathy Chase, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, and Darcy Peruzzotti

Member Absent: Chairperson Dee Hauber, Commissioners Jane Dauphinais, Brandon Marley, and Jennifer White.

II. Citizens' Petitions:

None.

III. Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Commissioner Frink, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky, to approve the Minutes of the July 25, 2016 meeting. The vote carried 6-0-1 with Chair Pro Tem Aument abstaining.

Commissioner White arrived at 6:40 p.m.

IV. Communications:

a. Chairperson

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he received correspondence from Peg Adams.

Commissioner Dauphinais arrived at 6:40 p.m.

b. Members:

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she informed Mrs. Adams that the first meeting of every month will have Citizens' Petitions.

V. New Business:

a. Review of Budget Presentation:

Commissioner White commended Finance director Landry on her budget presentation from the last Charter Revision Commission meeting, and she noted that there is a great budget process for the Town of Groton. She stated that the Commission may be able to help Finance Director Landry with the budget timeline.

Commissioner Chase commended Finance Director Landry on her presentation, and she noted that as a new person, the information provided was helpful.

Chair Pro Tem Aument commended Finance Director Landry for her budget presentation, and he stated she is very receptive, and the Commission appreciates her support of the community.

Commissioner Mello stated that Director Landry's presentation gave him insight into the Town Manager and the Council's role in the budget process, and he noted that the presentation helped him understand the budget process.

Commissioner Frink stated that he researched Town Council referral 2015-0219 regarding the Town Council Budget Discussion for the FYE 2017 budget. He noted that the referral reflects the history of approximately four or five Committee of the Whole meetings held during August 2015 through April 2016. He stated that he will send the referral information to the Commission electronically. He stated that he had completed some research on key performance indicators and the budget process for the City of San Luis Obispo, California. He noted that San Luis Obispo holds their budget meeting for citizens' input in October. He noted that the Commission should go through the chart that is used to calculate the mill rate.

Commissioner Dauphinais requested a copy of the chart that is used to calculate Groton's mill rate.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that Public Act 15244 caps budget expenditures at 2.5 percent per year with debt service not included in the cap. She noted that this State mandate will force Towns to stay below the cap. Otherwise, they will be in jeopardy of losing State aid. She noted that another town in Connecticut recently told the State that it may not adhere to the mandate.

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Commissioner Granatosky noted that the article in the newspaper was reflecting citizens in Lyme or Old Lyme who were upset by the fact that the State of Connecticut proposes cuts back on the amount of money that is given to their town.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Representative Bumgardner brought the budget cap issue to the Town's attention months ago. She noted that Groton is interpreting the Public Act differently than Ledyard. She stated that Ledyard is interpreting the Act to mean that if taxes increase more than 2.5 percent then the Town will lose State money. She stated that Groton is interpreting to mean that if revenues decline, it does not matter and that the Town is not going to raise its budget more than 2.5 percent. However, if the revenues decline then taxes will increase more than 2.5 percent. She stated that this will not do anything for Groton and the Town will still have enormous tax increases.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Kotowski affirmed that the question is: Is the 2.5 percent cap on the budget or on taxes? She noted that every town seems like it's doing its own thing.

Commissioner Granatosky clarified that the language of the Act states if a Town budget increases more than the rate of inflation or 2.5 percent, whichever is greater. She noted that the Act goes in to effect in the year FYE 2018.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated the Commission needs clarification on the Public Act from Director Landry or a State Representative.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that as long as Groton is not going to reduce spending to make up for declining revenues, it will have tax increases year after year. She noted that the Town can still stay 2.5 percent under the budget minimum, but with declining revenues, taxes will still increase.

Commissioner Dauphinais asked if the State of Connecticut has ever abided by a budget cap, and she noted it is the height of hypocrisy.

Commissioner Frink noted that Massachusetts had a Proposition 2.5 that put a limit on taxes increases, ten to fifteen years ago.

Commissioner Aument reaffirmed that the Commission needs to obtain more information on the Public Act.

Informal Vote for Identified Topics

- Staggered Terms of Office for the Town Council
- Term Limits for the Town Council
- Number of Councilors Needed to Remove the Town Manager
- Electing the Town Council by District
- Elected Mayor or Chairperson of the Town Council
- Size of the RTM

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that voting on the topics seems premature. She stated that if she does not know the game plan, she does not know how should could vote on the identified topics.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he agrees with Commissioner Peruzzotti.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Chairperson Hauber was trying to build a consensus through informal votes.

Commissioner White stated that informal voting would be used to get a feel for where the Commissioners are, and the votes are not binding. She stated than an example is if the Town is not going to have an RTM, then there is no reason to vote on the size of the RTM.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the voting is preliminary and is meant to get the discussion going.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she is looking for the problems within the Charter. She stated that the lists of topics to be voted on are specific, and if she had to vote on the identified topics, she would have to abstain.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that any informal vote would be based on opinion and an opinion could change if new information comes along.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she does not have an opinion until she knows what the problem is. She noted that she is trying to figure out what the Commission is trying to solve. She noted that one problem is how the Town controls a 7.8 percent tax increase. She stated that once she understands what the problems are, then she could get her hands around strategic solutions to fix the problems.

Commissioner Kotowski noted that in a previous brainstorming meeting, reasons were listed for each of the identified topics.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that Government Structure was first on the list based on a previous Commission meeting. He stated that the 'whys' under Government Structure include: referendum, calendar, RTM, finance, and others.

Commissioner Frink stated that he had the same thoughts as Commissioners Peruzzotti and Aument regarding working on the list. He proposed discussing topics in the context of Government Structure as in Town Council/Mayor/Town Manager/RTM; RTM versus No RTM; budget referendum; size of the Town Council; and Terms of office. He stated that discussions on the topics should include all of the variables under each topic.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she wants to identify the problems that the Commission is trying to solve for Government Structure.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that Commissioner Peruzzotti's question is great. She noted that the two problems she has heard are the cost of government and what is happening to taxes, and that it would be great to streamline peoples' interaction with government such as attracting new businesses and the permitting process.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that if the Commission takes straw votes, then she wants to be assured that the vote is not binding.

Commissioner Mello stated that he agrees with Commissioner Peruzzotti and that based upon citizens' comments at the Public Hearing, a budget referendum was is a big issue.

Peruzzotti stated that budget referendum is a possible solution, but that the problem is taxes and uncontrollable increases in the tax rate.

Commissioner White noted that some of the items that the Commission has brainstormed are issues that it will try to resolve. She listed the issues to include increased higher budgets, accountability between Town Council and the Town Manager, checks and balances, and communication between the government and the public.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Commission needs to know what the issues are and how to fix them in order to revise the Charter. He noted that the Commission may be focused on Government Structure for a couple months.

Commissioner Dauphinais asked what the Commission will do after taking a straw vote. She noted that she does not understand the purpose of taking a straw vote at this point in the process.

Commissioner Mello stated that he thinks the purpose of straw voting is to let everyone on the Commission know where each other stand on the current issues.

The Commissioners discussed the value of taking straw votes at this point in the process. The Commissioners agreed that there is a need to explore the specific topics in detail.

Commission Frink stated that the Town Council has abdicated too much power to the Town Manager.

Commissioner Peruzzotti identified that one problem may be that the Town Council does not give enough direction to the Town Manager.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Chairperson Hauber may have created the list as a way to organize topics to lead the group.

Commissioner Peruzzotti noted that streamlining the budget process, including the cost to prepare, which that takes over six months to develop, could be one topic the Commission addresses.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Commission could start with writing something into the Charter that provides the Town Council the ability to give the Town Manager more direction.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Commission should look at the duplication that takes place in Groton. He noted that he researched other forms of government through the National League of Cities, and he found that the RTM form of government is found in only 1% of cities. He reviewed duplication in the budget process for the RTM and Town Council. He noted the sentiment in the room seems to be that the RTM works. He stated that based upon his research, a Council form of government is most popular for Connecticut municipalities.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that duplication of the efforts of the legislative body should be a topic for the list.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that it is important to read the Charter and understand Groton's governmental structure. She noted the RTM's duty is limited, and one of its duties is approving the budget in place of a referendum.

Commissioner White stated that she feels that the Council has the power but is not acting on it. She noted that there is a possibility for incoming Town Councilors to receive external training that focuses on financial duties and responsibilities of the Council. She stated that the Council should act as a board of directors, and the Town Manager should be reporting to it.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated personalities matter and that cannot be put in the Charter. He noted that there may be a way to structure things so the Council can have more power.

Commissioner White stated that the Town Manager is doing his job and is acting as a CEO for the Town of Groton.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he is CEO of the Town, but he answers to the Council. He noted that personalities aside, Town Councilors volunteer and put in varying degrees of time in order to get desired results from the Town Manager. He noted that the Democrats and Republicans who are elected to the Council seem to get along.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that one way to re-establish Council authority is to potentially change language in the powers and duties section of 7.2 of the Town Charter to reflect "the Council may direct the Town Manager" to "the Town Council shall direct the Town Manager."

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Town Manager is a paid professional, and that the Town Council's job is to direct him or her as to policy. She stated that the Town Manager needs to hear the bigger vision related to setting goals from the Town Council and not micromanaging directives. She noted that there may be a need to conduct a retreat when they are first elected in order to have a specific time to set policy.

Commissioner Frink noted that in the business world there would be a multi-year business plan. He stated there is a need to measure successes and failures. He suggested doing research in other communities to see their use for metrics. He stated that it starts with the Town Council setting expectations, setting funding, measuring results, and repeating. He noted that he envisions this plan to be a document that comes out annually.

Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that it is important to look at what can be changed in the Town's Charter to get at the problems. He stated that he has started to look at other towns' charters.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission can require a five year, three year, or multi-year business plan.

Commissioner Granatosky proposed a two-year business plan to match the Council Term.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that five years is better in business, but she noted that she thinks it needs to be two years. She noted that the Town of Groton does not have an Ethics Commission that a previous Council established. She noted that a budget referendum would be a form of checks and balances to stop out-of-control spending of taxpayer dollars.

The Commissioners discussed the ways in which the Commission could put something in writing that addressed the topic of discussion. Commissioner Frink suggested that the Commission use general language to address the topic of discussion, for example, the Commission would like the Town Council to set policy and the propose the framework for doing that.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that any business plan should be tied to terms of office.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she has an issue with using a business model because government is not a business. She stated that she would like it to be referred to as a municipal plan.

Commissioner Mello asked if the Economic and Market Trends Analysis could be used to look at the trends for economic development for the Town of Groton.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that a plan could focus funding to a specific area, or areas, and the directives from the Town Council could be given to the Town Manager, and then the Manager would take the budget and feed it to a specific area.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she has a problem with the \$250,000 for consulting for zoning regulations and \$500,000 to write them. She noted that Groton should be able to use a template from the Southeastern Council of Governments for free.

Commissioner Frink respectfully disagreed with Commissioner Kotowski.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that one thing to tackle in checks and balances and accountability is the degree to which the Council directs the Manager and the degree to which he responds to measurable outcomes. She noted that the Town Council shall develop a multiyear plan by year end of their election.

In response to Commissioner Chase's question, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that this Council gave the Town Manager clear budget direction this year.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that recently directives have been budget direction and not policy direction. She noted that the previous Council emphasized economic development.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that when she was a member of the Town Council she remembered giving policy directives. She noted that previous Town Councils had a Saturday all-day goal setting session right after an election.

The Commissioners discussed the terminated Commercial trash hauling issue for the Town of Groton.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the budget issue is key.

Commissioner White stated that we need to have a vision for Groton. She compared other municipalities in Connecticut that have different economic models and businesses.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission should structure government that lets the people figure out what they want for Groton.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the language should be open enough to change as the populous changes.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that we cannot control which businesses come into to Groton. She noted that the Commission should discuss the highest level of what form of government it wants. She stated that the Commission should start discussing the form of government and a check and balance for the budget. She noted that in every town there is a second stage of budget approval either a Board of Finance, a Referendum, or a RTM as a modern form of a town meeting.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there are seven RTMs in the state of Connecticut, and that Groton is the only municipality that has Town Manger/Town Council form of government.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she has information on forms of government in Connecticut. She stated that she will send out statistical data for the types of government that exist in Connecticut. She stated that Groton is a large town, and large towns have professional managers. She noted that based upon District Reference Groups, towns that are similar to Groton have professional managers without town meetings and referendums.

Commissioner Frink made a motion to study and discuss government structure: Town Council with Mayor elected separately or not, Town Manager, RTM, and Referendum. The motion failed because of a lack of a second.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she would like to research a Board of Supervisors, like what is used in New York State, as a possible form of government.

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion that next week's agenda include an in depth discussion of various municipal government structures in the State of Connecticut. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kotowski. The motion passed by a unanimous vote of 10-0-0.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she looks forward to the discussion and getting the list of towns that are similar to Groton and information from Chair Pro Tem Aument's Connecticut government structure book.

Commissioner Frink clarified that every Commissioner will participate and conduct research on government structures and then share the information via e-mail before the next meeting.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that it would be helpful to have people present a summary of a different form of government to the Commission to include paid professionals, elected officials, and any stipends.

The Commissioners discussed the towns that could be compared to Groton's population of approximately 40,000 people: Cheshire, Branford, West Haven, Glastonbury, Southington, Norwich, and Shelton.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that it is good to look at similar District Reference Groups for comparable socioeconomic factors.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission should not limit its research to towns like Groton, but it should look for best models in management and practice.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that Groton cannot be compared to a town with a population of two-thousand people because it is not practical.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that benchmarking is done in his industry and sometimes travel is required for it. He noted that there are different forms of government such as regionalization and county-based government. He noted that he does not think Connecticut is there yet, but government changes in baby steps because it is designed that way.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he did not find information regarding a second phase check on the budget after the Council. He noted that there are approximately twenty-five Council/Town Manager forms of government in Connecticut, and he would e-mail the list of towns to the Commissioners.

In response to Commissioner Peruzzotti, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she has not heard of a municipality with a single phase budget process. She noted that she would like to know for next week's meeting which towns have a single phase budget process.

The Commissioners and Town Clerk had a discussion regarding the role and effectiveness of CCM, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Commissioner Kotowski noted that the Town of Groton pays CCM per capita, and she did not have a good experience with CCM in the past.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that OPM and the State Law Library have been responsive.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Town Clerk will research technological options for media displays for the next meeting. He reviewed the topics covered in his forms of government book: Selectman/Town Meeting (RTM), Mayor/Council, and Council/Manager, regionalization, and Charter Revision process. He noted that at the end of the Charter Revision process the Commission is going to submit language to the Town Attorney. He suggested thinking about motions that would be used to change the Charter.

Town Clerk Moukawsher reviewed the correspondence regarding end-of-year department spending that she sent to the Charter Revision Commission.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that legislative ordinances and power of initiative, duties of the RTM, have been misinterpreted, and there may be other areas of the Charter that have been misinterpreted, and she questioned if anybody would be interested using a meeting to go through the Charter from beginning to end.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that it may be valuable to go through the Charter at the end of the Charter Revision process.

Commissioner Kotowski agreed with Commissioner Dauphinais.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Town Clerk Moukawsher clarified her correspondence regarding Charter Section 9.10.4, page 18. She stated that she sent her correspondence to the Charter Revision Commission as an example of how to rewrite a section in order for there to be clarity in the meaning. She stated that she sent it to the Town Council and the Town Manager. She noted that when revising the Charter, it is important to make sure the revisions can be understood.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he thought the Charter Revision Commission should stay autonomous at this point in the process.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that looking at the language in the Charter is constructive because it shows a problem and then it has a possible way to make it so language is not misinterpreted in the Charter so that unspent money goes back to the general fund.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she wanted to get back to the idea of setting up different forms of government and comparing and contrasting them.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the budget referendum has the largest push from the community, and he noted that it is a form of government that needs to be looked into for the next meeting. He stated that there are various forms of referendum and include triggers, cost of living, and Public Acts to consider. He stated that the Commission is still in the information gathering phase, and the more information the better. He noted that discussions can lead to change.

Commissioner suggested that web links should be sent to share information with small summaries instead of PDFs.

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Frink, to invite the Town Manger to the next meeting to discuss the Town Manager form of Government.

Commissioner Peruzzotti amended the motion, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky, to bring the Town Manager to the Charter Revision Commission for fifteen minutes to explain the pros and cons of our form of government.

Commissioner Frink amended the motion to limited amount of time, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais. Vote: 9-1-0, Chair Pro Tem Aument opposed.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she would like to limit the amount of time for Town Manager because the Commission has only a limited amount of time to look at the different forms of government structures.

Commissioner Kotowski suggested the Commission wait until after the Commission goes through the different forms of government and then the Commission can invite the Town Manager if the Commission feels the need to.

Commissioner Frink stated that it would be wise to get the Town Manager's perspective.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Town Manager may be able to answer some specific questions. She stated that the Commission may gain clarity through a discussion with the Town Manager.

Commissioner Aument stated that he is not ready to ask the Town Manager questions yet.

Commissioner Chase stated that she would like to hear what the Town Manager has to say.

The Commissioners discussed possible time limits for a discussion with the Town Manager.

The Commissioners discussed possible topics of discussion with the Town Manager.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Town Manager has a wealth of information.

The Commissioners discussed the potentially to invite other speaker to share opinions regarding other forms of government.

Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Dauphinais, seconded by Commissioner Chase, The motion carried unanimously by a vote of 10-0-0. Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:14 p.m.

Attest:

Scott Aument
Secretary