

TOWN OF GROTON  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
August 21, 2017  
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Hauber called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Chair Hauber, Commissioners Scott Aument, Kathy Chase, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, Darcy Peruzzotti, and Jennifer White.  
Members Absent: Commissioner Jane Dauphinais and Brandon Marley.

Commissioner Dauphinais arrived at 6:33 PM.

II. CITIZENS' PETITIONS:

None

III. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Public Hearing

1. Proposed Changes to the Town Charter.

Town Clerk Moukawsher read the call for the Public Hearing that appeared in The Day newspaper on August 11, 2017.

Fred Kent, 120 Warren Avenue, Mystic, CT stated that he agrees with the conclusions of the Charter Revision Commission. He recommended that all taxpayers in Groton have the ability to vote in budget referendum. He noted that taxation with representation is a founding principle, and it should be upheld; if the Town can send out a tax bill, it can send out a ballot.

Barbara Tarbox, 74 Algonquin Drive, Mystic, thanked the Commission members for their hard work. She noted that she mostly agrees with the report issued by Commissioners Dauphinais and White. She noted that in Stonington, of the last nine referendums, one was sent to a second referendum; this is an argument that they are not needed because the officials got the budget right the first time. She stated that a seven member Board of Finance will not provide as much representation and diversity as the RTM. She noted that minority representation will be required for the Board of Finance and Town Council. She stated that she does not agree with term limits and prohibiting Town and Board of Education employees from serving. She stated that the Town Manager will be putting together the annual Town Report. She stated that in certain places in the revisions, there is an attempt to micromanage the Town Manager. She noted that absentee ballots are not available by mail for a referendum held less than 21 days. She stated that with the revisions, the hired professionals are not being trusted to do their jobs. She posed questions, suggestions, and offered opinions to the Commission. Ms. Tarbox's comments have been received for the record and are on file in the Town Clerk's office.

Bonnie Nault, 41 Pearl Street, Mystic, thanked the Commissioners for the work they did on the Charter. She stated that she supports Commissioner Frink's summary. She stated that she supports staggered terms, term limits, and the Board of Finance; she supports a structure change to the Town.

Lian Obrey, 8 Vista Point Road, Groton, stated that she appreciates the time the Commissioners put into the Commission. She stated that she supports keeping the RTM; it is the best place to learn what is happening in the Town. She stated that Groton is too diverse to have a seven-person board judge a budget. She stated that people in Groton depend on the Council and RTM to make good decisions. She stated that RTM members do a good deal of research on the budget, work in committees, and share the work done in committee with the rest of the RTM. She noted that there will be a lack of communication between elected officials and the people who live in Groton if the RTM is taken away. She stated that the RTM is a good place to learn about the process of local government; it is the heart of this Town.

Kevin Trejo, 536 Shennecossett Road, stated that he supports keeping the RTM. He stated that the RTM has representation in all seven districts; it is not broken. He stated that the majority of the people who serve on the RTM appreciate it; it works.

Sue Southerland, 32 Neptune Drive, Groton, stated that she supports the recommendations of the Charter Revision Commission on the Board of Finance, elimination of RTM, term limits, and staggered terms. She stated that she wants this to go to the voters.

Rachael Franco, 28 Topsail Lane, Mystic, stated that she believes the RTM should remain. She questioned how much it would cost to have multiple elections and referendums. She noted that with budget issues with the State, she does not know if there should be multiple referendums.

Keith Hedrick, Mayor of the City of Groton, 156 Shennecossett Parkway, noted that it may be good to have another public hearing so that people have more time to look at the proposed changes. He stated that he has concerns with the qualifications of those who serve on the Board of Finance. He stated that he agrees with the minority reports. He stated that he supports representation of all districts that the RTM provides. He stated that the Town Manager's powers are diminished with some of the changes to the Charter; the Town Manger should issue the annual report. He noted that he is concerned that there is not a minimum voter turnout for the referendum and the cost of it. He stated that with the timeline, there is enough time for no more than two referendums. He stated that one becomes familiar with the budget when he or she is on the RTM; it is another reason to keep it.

Kathy Neugent, 215 Yetter Road, Mystic, thanked the Commissioners for their hard work. She stated that she agrees with the previous comments about the RTM. She stated that she does not agree with the budget referendum. She referenced an article in the New London Day from November 28, 2016 regarding North Stonington's budget. She stated that there were three referendums to pass the Town budget months after the start of the fiscal year; there was sixteen percent voter turnout for that referendum. She stated that Groton is more complex than North Stonington. She noted that Groton has diverse neighborhoods and wants and needs need to be balanced with fiscal constraints. She stated that she envisions there will be constituencies who will come together to defeat the budget; it will be difficult to pass a budget in Groton. She stated that she believes this year's education budget would not have passed referendum. She stated that she has concerns with the Board of Finance being elected at large. She stated that she agrees with four-year staggered terms for the Town Council and forming an Ethics Commission, but she does not agree with terms limits.

Jean-Claude Ambroise, 169 Shennecossett Parkway, City of Groton, stated that he agrees with Barbara Tarbox; he urged the Town Council to reject the proposed changes. He stated that this is radical change to our form of government; it is change for the good? He stated that this places more power in a small group of citizens; Groton is a diverse Town. He stated that people who are politically and financially motivated will hold the power. He stated that Board of Finance decisions will be made on monetary positions. He stated that the referendum will bring out NO votes; he does not support it. He stated that he supports term limits. He commended the Commissioners on their service. He stated that he does not support the elimination of the RTM; there is no district representation if it is eliminated. He noted that approving this would result in a socioeconomically discriminatory environment for the Town. He noted that it does not make sense to prohibit a Town employee who works and pays taxes to the Town from representing his or her community.

Diane Barber, Town Councilor, 172 Crosswinds Drive, Noank, thanked the Commissioners for their work. She stated that she will trust the decision of the Commission. She stated that there is a reason the RTM form of government is falling by the wayside. She noted that change can be difficult. She stated that residents should be able to vote on the budget. She stated that most people do not mind paying taxes, but they do not like wasteful money; there should be a vote on the budget.

Marian Galbraith, 771 Shennecossett Road, noted that she appreciates the amount of time the Commissioners gave up for the community. She stated that she is opposed to the proposed budget process. She stated that it is not good to do away with the RTM. She noted that the RTM is representative and its deliberations on the budget are informed. She noted that the amount of in-depth review that the RTM does on the budget cannot be replicated in the proposed budget process. She stated that she rejects the referendum on the following levels: bifurcation of vote, no minimum voter turnout requirement, and continued votes. She stated that she does not support replacing the RTM with a no-limit budget referendum. She stated that the Town has a budget process that works.

Jill Rusk, City Councilor, 85 Baker Avenue, stated that far too often there is not representation of every district on the Town Council. She noted that the Board of Finance would represent a small percentage of the Town. She stated that without a representative Town Council and Board of Finance, she cannot support the recommendations of the Charter Revision Commission.

Juliette Parker, 520F Shennecossett Road, RTM member, stated that with the elimination of the RTM, there are no checks and balances on the Finance Board. She stated that she is concerned with the lack of representation with a Board of Finance. She noted that there will be people who will not understand the budget process. She noted that the Board of Finance will need to communicate budget information to the entire Town.

Commissioner Kotowski read statements by Ed Ettinger and Bobbi Jo Cini. Their comments have been received for the record.

Commissioner Granatosky read statements from the following individuals; they have been received for the record:

Elissa Wright

Elizabeth Duarte

David Rose and Shirleyann Dunbar-Rose

Natalie Burfoot Billing  
Rosemary Robertson  
Jackie Massett

Chair Hauber stated that there would be a five-minute break.

Chair Hauber re-convened the meeting at 7:42 p.m.

b. Approval of Draft Report

The Commissioners discussed sentence structure of Section 9.10.1; no changes were made.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that the City was well represented at the Public Hearing, and residents of the City supported the RTM and opposed the referendum. She questioned if Commissioners wanted to review keeping the RTM and eliminating the referendum.

Commissioner Mello stated that he expected individuals to support the RTM. He stated that based upon initial Commission meetings, he was under the impression that the RTM was not functioning. He noted that the members of the RTM will participate in a referendum in addition to other people who are entitled to vote on the budget.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Commission spent fifteen months going over this. He stated that the people on the Commission are a good representation of Groton. He supports leaving the draft Charter and recommendations alone; pass it to the Town Council.

Commissioner Chase stated that the majority of the people who spoke were from the City; that is one part of Town. She supports letting this go to the voters.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the comments this evening were coming from one part of Town. She stated that she was surprised by the comments that supported district representation on the Board of Finance, Town Council, and Board of Education.

Commissioner White noted that it is important to make sure everyone knows that the Town Attorney issued an opinion on non-resident taxpayers voting in referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Commission has been at this for over a year. She stated that at this point, the Council should do with it what it will.

Commissioner Aument reviewed statistics from the Public Hearing: 11/22 people were from the City; 17/22 people are/were former/current elected officials; 13/22 people were against all or some of the recommendations; 9/22 were in favor of the proposed changes. He stated that the status-quo was represented at the Public Hearing. He noted that based upon feedback he has received throughout the year, this is a decent product. He stated that based upon comments to the Commission from the Town Council, there may be a need to change, or modify, recommendations.

Commissioner Mello stated that he is reluctant to take advice from the Town Council; he does not want to change the Charter based upon its advice.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that people are concerned with geographic representation-not minority representation. She noted that citizens are turning out to voice their opposition to the proposed changes.

Commissioner Aument made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Frink, to approve the draft report.

**Vote: PASSES**

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

**Opposed: 4 (Hauber, Dauphinais, Granatosky, Peruzzotti)**

**Abstained: 0**

Commissioner Frink reviewed the next steps.

#### IV. ADJOURMENT

Commissioner Granatosky made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Chair Hauber. Chair Hauber adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.