

TOWN OF GROTON  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
August 22, 2016  
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Pro Tem Aument, Commissioner Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rosanne Kotowski, Brandon Marley, and Daniel Mello.

Members Absent: Chair Dee Hauber, Commissioners Darcy Peruzzotti and Jennifer White.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. Meeting of August 8, 2016

A motion was made by Commissioner Granatosky, seconded by Commissioner Kotowski, to approve the minutes. The motion as amended carried unanimously 8-0-0.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that her comment on page six regarding Economic Development was in response Commissioner Frink's comment that nobody disagrees with money being spent on the Economic Development Commission.

Commissioner Aument clarified the vote on page nine to limit the amount of time set aside for the discussion with the Town Manager was 8-2-0.

III. Communications

- a. Chairman: None.
- b. Secretary: None.
- c. Members: None.

IV: New Business:

a. Commissioners findings on Government Structure

Commissioner Frink proposed and distributed a task list. He suggested that the Commission review Charter Chapters III (Officers and Elections), IV (Representative Town Meeting), V (Town Council/Ordinances), and IX (Budget and Finance).

Commissioner Kotowski suggested adding 7.2 to the list.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink noted that the task list is meant to focus the Commission.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the task list was well organized.

In response to Commissioners Granatosky and Mello, Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that tonight's meeting would focus on Government Structure.

Commissioner Frink stated that he is interested in a schedule and milestones.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she researched six towns (populations slightly below and above Groton). She noted that her information came from the Department of Public Health (2008) and by contacting towns to ask questions about their budget processes. She reported that Norwich has a City Manager that is appointed by the City Council, the budget is approved by the City Council, and the check on the budget is the Comptroller. She outlined Norwich's budget process: City Manager and Comptroller meet with the City Council, the Comptroller sends budget requests, Department heads give input, the City Manager and the Comptroller meet, the Comptroller calculates revenue estimates, budgets are presented in March, the City Manager presents a proposed budget to the City Council in April, there is a public hearing, and then the budget is adopted in May and the mill rate is set in June. She noted that having a Comptroller is a popular method of check on the budget. She stated that Torrington has a City Council, a Mayor elected at large, and a Board of Finance. She stated the budget goes from the Mayor to the Town Council to the Board of Finance, and the Board of Finance has the final say on the budget. She stated that Shelton has an elected Mayor at Large, an Alderman, and a Finance Board. Southington has a Town Manager that reports to the Town Council with a Board of Finance, and the public comment is in public hearings. She noted that Wallingford has a Comptroller that develops a budget, it goes to the Mayor, and then the final step is the Town Council. She stated that she was disappointed that there seems to be a lack of public input, and the towns she researched did not have budget referendum.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that it seems like there is not a stop for the budget after the City Council in the City of Norwich.

Chair Pro Tem Aument noted that Norwich has a Strong Mayor who is elected separately.

Commissioner Chase stated that she found an article published by Sacred Heart University on the different forms of government in Connecticut, and she noted

the conclusion of the article is the structure Groton has currently, the Council/Manager, is the best. She stated that the Town Manager has no political constraints, and decisions can be made on the economy and efficiency.

Commissioner Frink stated that he conducted research on the City of San Luis Obispo, California. He noted that the City is similar in population to Groton, the Mayor elected at large, and it has four City Councilors and a City Manager. He noted a difference between Groton and San Luis Obispo is the median home prices (Groton \$220,000 and San Luis Obispo \$450,000). He stated that the City of Obispo ensures its budget process, and elected officials, address the most pressing budget needs of the City. He noted the City starts gathering public input on the budget in December and starts to establish a two-year financial plan and goals for the City, and then the town staff builds its budget around the goals and plan. He noted there are workshops on the budget.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink stated that the goal setting process is not in the City's Charter, but there are ordinances. He noted that in the 1980's the City of San Luis Obispo had a process that was similar to Groton's, and they changed it when they felt like it was not working.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink stated the final budget is adopted in June. He noted there are budget workshops in May and June before the budget is adopted.

Commissioner Granatosky questioned if there is additional public opinion after initial public input at the beginning of the budget process.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Frink stated that there is not another check after the Council in San Luis Obispo. He noted there is a half-cent sales tax in the City that was implemented when California was underfunding municipalities. He stated the four-person City Council is elected to staggered four year terms, and the Mayor is elected at large to a two-year term. He noted the City has a two-year financial plan.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Town Clerk Moukawsher clarified that in Groton there is one public hearing after the March 15<sup>th</sup> deadline and an annual RTM budget meeting where Citizens Petitions are allowed.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that more people attend the RTM's budget meeting than the Council's public hearing on the budget because of the amount of publicity.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she obtained information on the Connecticut District Reference Groups (DRG) from the Connecticut School Finance Project. She noted Groton is DRG "G," and it is important to look at comparable socioeconomic factors as well as population statistics. She stated that she created an Excel spreadsheet that summarized her findings. She noted that based on data from the Office of Policy and Management, OPM, in 2015, other towns in DRG "G" that have budget referendums are East Windsor, Killingly, Naugatuck, and Windsor Locks. She reviewed the number of times comparable towns had failed budget referendum between 1997 and 2002. She noted that 76 towns out of 169 reported referendums to OPM. She noted there may have been towns that could have had referendum on the budget but did not this year. She stated that she researched costs for elections because it needs to be considered if the Commission is going to be discussing referendum. She noted that the cost of a referendum in Preston is low. She stated that the overall cost of an election is easily \$23,000 for the Town of Groton.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Town is bound by Charter regarding costs for elections (printing and posting). She noted the Registrar of Voters determines the number of voting districts for a referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that according to the Registrar of Voters, the total cost for one voting district is \$14,890. She noted there are 40,000 people in the Town of Groton.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he researched Norwich, Shelton, Cheshire, Branford, Glastonbury, Southington, Milford, and Naugatuck. He noted that Cheshire has a budget referendum, Council/Manager, no RTM, and there is a written contract between the Town Manager and Town Council that is not to exceed three years with nine Councilors (elected every two years), and there is an automatic referendum. He stated that Branford has an RTM, Board of Selectmen, a paid First Selectman, three year term for the Board of Finance (six people three maximum from one party), the RTM is last line for the budget. (The budget process is Board of Finance to Selectmen to RTM). He stated that Glastonbury is Council/Manager form of government, nine unpaid Councilors, paid Town Manager, and the Manager gets a lot of assistance on the budget from the Board of Finance. He noted the citizens can petition a budget referendum (8 percent needed to petition, limit of once a year, needs minimum 18 percent for the vote on the referendum). He noted that Southington has a Council/Manager form of government and need a simple majority to remove the Town Manager, and Glastonbury requires six out of nine votes. He noted that Milford has a strong paid Mayor, a Board of Alderman, a Board of Finance (five people serve three year terms).

Commissioner Granatosky noted that the towns Chair Pro Tem Aument covered are in higher DRGs.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Commission could compare types of governments that do not have the same demographics of Groton.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the demographics of a municipality cannot be dismissed when comparing types of governments.

Commissioner Mello agreed with Commissioner Granatosky in that comparisons of forms of government structure should be made with respect to similar population and income to Groton.

Commissioner Frink stated that if it is a best practice, then he does not care where it comes from.

Commissioner Kotowski agreed with Commissioner Frink.

Commissioner Mello noted that efficiency in government and not duplicating services should be foremost on the Commissioners' minds.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that Groton has a government it cannot afford without raising taxes every year.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Commissioners should start with determining if they are looking for a Council/Manager form of government. She noted that larger cities have a strong Mayor form of government, and she does not think it is a good idea.

Commissioner Frink noted that he is comfortable with the Town Manager/Town Council form of government.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that a good starting point would be to determine if the Commission wants a paid professional Town Manager.

Commissioner Mello stated that he would not like to see the Town Manager form of government go away.

Commissioner Dauphinais noted that she likes that the Town Manager is not elected and subject to politics (the person hiring and firing department heads is not subject to campaign contributions).

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he likes the Council/Mayor form of government. He noted an alternative to the RTM would be a budget referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that she does not want to be bound by a straw vote and would like the option of revisiting the issue with the full body.

In response to Commissioners Frink and Dauphinais, Commissioner Kotowski stated that she thinks Groton should have a strong Mayor. She stated that at this time, she does not think she could determine that staggered terms for the Town Council would be a good change because she does not think they work for the Board of Education. She stated that she does not want to say right now that she agrees with the Town Manager/Council form of government because she does not feel the budget process works without more public input on the budget. She noted that she needs more public input on the budget before she agrees to anything.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Kotowski stated that that she would have a Mayor elected at large, with each district having its own representative on the Town Council and Board of Education, a budget referendum, and a Board of Finance by district. She noted the advantage of having a Strong Mayor is having somebody who is elected by the public who is leading the charge.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there could be a Town Council with a separately elected Mayor.

In response to Commissioner Mello, Commissioner Kotowski stated that there could still be a Town Manager. She noted there should be somebody at the top who is elected by the people.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she thought Norwich and New London have City Managers and a Mayor that is stronger than Groton's Mayor (a figurehead). She noted the purview of the Mayor in Norwich is economic development, which is spelled out in its City Charter.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Mayor would be elected and a Deputy Mayor (City/Town Manager) under the Mayor who would run the Town. She noted that the Mayor would be at the top of the Government. She stated that there would be Town Council (by district) which would serve as check and balances. She stated that the budget would go from the Board of Finance (seven members by district) to the Town Council to the Mayor to the voters. She noted that a budget referendum would

be the final check. She stated that the bottom line is that people would have more say.

Commissioner Mello stated that there would still need to be a Manager or Deputy to run the government.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she works in a town that has a strong management team under the Mayor (paid professional, sets policy), so there is no need for a Town Manager.

Commissioner Granatosky noted that the fear is somebody in a position of great power who is seeking campaign donations.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Town of Groton is too complex for somebody who is not a professional (trained in municipal government).

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he is more willing to look into the power the Council has over the Manager than a Strong Mayor form of government.

In response to Chair Pro Tem, Commissioner Frink stated that the Mayor and the Town Manager create the consent calendar.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that one way to re-establish Council authority is a change to 7.2 (The Town Council "may" direct the Town Manager to the Town Council "shall" direct the Town Manager).

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Commission could reduce the number of people needed to dismiss the Town Manager.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that it would not have to be a super majority; it could be two-thirds.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Chair Pro Tem stated that based upon his research, Glastonbury requires six out of nine votes, and Southington requires a simple majority out of nine Councilors.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Mello stated that there could be an elected Mayor (without increasing his or her power) which would promote more participation by the people.

Commissioner Chase stated that if the Council sets goals (meaningful, measurable, with measured outcomes) for the Town Manager, it would better oversee what he or she is doing, and there would be something to judge the Manager by.

In response to Commission Granatosky, Commissioner Chase stated that she is in favor of a paid Town Manager.

Commissioner Dauphinais made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Frink, to take a straw vote to decide if the Commissioners support a Council/ Town Manager form of government. Vote: 6-0-2 (Commissioners Marley and Kotowski abstaining)

In response to Commissioner Mello, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that this does not exclude a Mayor.

Commissioner Granatosky clarified that the Commission is not bound by the vote, and the Commission can return to the issue.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Commission is trying to gain consensus through a straw vote and the Commission could return to the issue at a later date.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Commission is agreeing there is a problem. She stated that the problem is we need somebody who is educated enough to understand the complexities of our town government. She stated that the solution to the problem is a paid professional.

Commissioner Marley stated that the problem is the solution. He noted the current system is not working. He asked how the Commission is going to fix the solution by voting on the same system of government that exists now.

Commission Mello questioned if there is a problem with the Charter or personalities.

In response to Commissioner Mello, Commissioner Marley stated that he does not see a solution here.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated the Commission has not started to discuss the shape of the Town Council, the way in which a Mayor would be elected, number of Council votes for Town Manager dismissal, changing "may" to "shall," and she stated there is plenty of room after this to tackle those problems. She stated that she disagrees that the current system is not working.

Commissioner Marley stated that without the problems being addressed, he cannot vote on the Town Manager or Town Council structure because he does not see it working now.

In response to Chair Pro Tem Aument, Commissioner Marley stated that he does not know which structure of government he would propose.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Commission will revisit the issue, and the vote is based upon the discussion from tonight's meeting.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Commissioners should come back to the Commission with an alternate form of government if it is different from a Town Manager form of government. She noted that this is early in the process.

The Commissioners discussed possible topics of discussion for future meetings.

Commissioner Frink proposed that the Commission starts with Chapter IX Budget and Finance (how do we want our budget developed, with/without citizen input, with professional input, checks and balances)

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commission Frink stated that the Commission could have conversations that do not protect the status quo.

Commissioner Mello stated that he would like to stay with the structure of government.

Commissioner Frink stated that his task list reflects elements of what the government could be (including role of the Town Manager, budget development, role of the Town Council, role of the RTM and citizens, referendum)

Commissioner Mello stated that the elements of government structure relate to people participating.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that based upon his research, there are paid professionals in the form of a Board of Finance in replacement of a RTM, and does not know if that would work for the Town of Groton. He noted that a budget referendum was a major topic during the public hearing.

Chair Pro Tem Aument suggested that the following topics appear on the next agenda: RTM, Board of Finance.

Commissioner Frink questioned how the Commission envisions budget development and the government structure that is needed for it.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that structure of government in the budget process (in her perfect world) would mean a paid professional and the Town Council solicits input from the public, commissions, and advisory groups, and

then the Manager (paid professional) presents the budget to the Town Council, the Council votes on the budget, and then there would be a second check. She noted that she has not resolved what the second check would be yet.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the status quo is maintained for the first two steps of Commissioner Dauphinais' process. She noted that if the status quo is not altered then the problem remains in that the Council could determine it wants a zero tax increase, and the Town Manager could state he or she is giving the Council a level services budget.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that under the current Charter, if the Town Council feels his (Town Manager's) reasons for doing that are unjust, the Council could fire him (Town Manager).

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he wants public input on the budget. He noted that the Commission could look at when the Town Council is sworn in to office.

Commissioner Frink stated that alternating terms could help as well.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that required public hearings could be put into the Charter.

The Commissioners discussed which items should appear on the next agenda.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Commission should start with Chapter III (Officers and Elections), then go to the Town Manager (how Council and Manager will interact), and then go to Budget and Finance.

Commissioner Mello stated that he appreciated Commissioner Frink for putting together the task list.

Commissioner Marley stated that he likes the timeline in Commissioner Frink's task list.

The Commissioners decided that Chapters III, V, and VII would be discussed September 12, September 26, October 3, 2016, and Chapter IX would tentatively be discussed on October 17, 2016.

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Marley, seconded by Commissioner Mello. The motion carried unanimously by a vote of 8-0-0. Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Attest:

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Scott Aument  
Secretary