

TOWN OF GROTON
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
October 03, 2016
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Chairperson Dee Hauber, Chair Pro Tem Scott Aument, Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rosanne Kotowski, Darcy Peruzzotti, and Jennifer White.

Members Absent: Commissioners Brandon Marley and Mello.

II. Approval of Minutes:

- a. A motion was made by Commissioner Frink, seconded by Commissioner Kotowski, to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2016 meeting as amended.

Commissioner Kotowski reviewed why she wanted to include the transcript of the Town Manager's comments in the minutes of September 12, 2016.

Commissioner Mello arrived at 6:38 p.m.

Vote: 10-0-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Granatosky, seconded by Chair Hauber, to approve the minutes of the September 26, 2016 meeting as amended. Vote: 10-0-0. Commissioner Granatosky stated that her comments regarding purchases of the budget book and accessing the budget on the Town's website are for fiscal year 2015.

III. Communications:

Chair Hauber: None

Chair Pro Tem Aument: None

Commissioner Frink stated that he communicated via e-mail with the First Selectman of Branford regarding their RTM.

Commissioner Granatosky stated she had an e-mail from Conrad Heede in which he expressed his opinions in favor of the RTM and a majority of Town Councilor to be needed for the removal of the Town Manager. She stated that she would forward the communication to the Commission.

Commissioner Chase stated that she reached out to party Chairs Conrad Heede and Dean Antipas. She stated that she was looking for the occupation of the RTM members. She noted that Conrad Heede responded to her phone call.

IV. New Business:

- a. Review Chapters III, V, VII of the current Town Charter.

The Commission established a "Parking Lot" that will be a list of topics to discuss and any recommended changes for future meetings.

Chair Pro Tem Aument reminded the Commission that he will be going before the Town Council Committee of the Whole to deliver a status update.

Commissioner White stated that she wanted to review section 3.3.2 of the Town Charter regarding staggered terms of the Town Council.

In response to Commissioner White, Commissioner Kotowski stated that there could not be three year terms because municipal elections occur on odd years.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner White stated that she would like to have three people elected to the Town Council every two years.

The Commissioners discussed various benefits and drawbacks to having staggered year and a four-year terms for the Town Council.

Commissioner Chase noted that a positive aspect of a four year term is the length of time it takes to learn everything about the town government.

Chair Pro Tem Aument clarified that Commissioner White's suggestion is to have staggered terms of four members elected to a four-year term and then five members elected to a four-year term.

Commissioner Dauphinais questioned if the Council would elect a new Mayor every two years.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that if there are staggered terms and the Mayor is not up for election, then the new Council would not get to vote for a new Mayor.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that every Council could elect a new Mayor.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she thinks a four year term is too long, and if there are staggered terms, each new Council should elect a new leader. She spoke in favor of changing the title from Mayor to Chairperson of the Town Council. She stated that she would prefer to stick with two-year terms.

Commissioner Frink reviewed the chart he distributed. He stated that the six Towns he researched that have RTMs have Boards of Finance and do not have Town Councils. He stated that maybe the RTM is not bad because it does a lot of heavy lifting for the budget work. He noted that a Town Council of nine or seven members is not enough to do legislation. He noted that there is a lack of review of the Town's finances on the Town Council's referral list. He stated that he is not ready to get rid of the RTM, and he is not sure if the Town of Groton is served well by a Town Council. He stated that the Town Council could be repurposed as a Board of Finance, and the RTM could become the legislative body with committees. He asked if the Town gets value in a Town Council that is led by the Town Manger.

Commissioner Mello stated that based upon his research through the Office of Legislative Research, 120 municipalities in Connecticut have Boards of Finance. He stated that he would distribute his findings electronically. He stated that he supports having a Town Council. He emphasized that he is in favor of efficiency and holding people accountable. He noted that he is not opposed to a Board of Finance, and he reviewed the term lengths of the Boards of Finance he researched.

Town Clerk Moukawsher clarified Groton's minority representation requirements under Connecticut State Statutes.

Commissioner Granatosky reviewed municipalities and their ratios of representation. She stated it may be difficult to get people to commit to longer terms, and she supports two-year rather than four year terms.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she favors a four year term for strategic goals.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he has looked at other Charters and did not see goal setting requirements. He noted that he agrees with goal setting, but he does not know where it fits in the Charter. He stated that if there is a four-year Council term, there should be goal setting.

Commissioner White proposed language that includes "a strategic plan needs to be reviewed every five years."

The Commissioners reviewed the meeting schedules of the Committee of the Whole and Town Council.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that having a four year term will not do anything to push the Town Council to set goals.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he agrees with not having a four year term. He noted that in the past the parties had trouble getting qualified people to run for election.

Commissioner Dauphinais proposed the following language for Town Charter section 5.4, Powers and Duties of the Town Council, "Within three months of taking office, the Council shall develop a prioritized set of goals with measurable outcomes for itself and the Town Manager to be achieved within its two year term." She stated that "measurable results" means an outcome that shows progress. She stated that four year terms would allow Councilors to think about what they could accomplish in four years versus two, and there would be long-term, more strategic thinking.

Commissioner Mello stated that he agrees with four-year terms for the Town Council, and he supports the commitment it requires. He stated that there would be more of an opportunity to work towards a strategic plan.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that there may be some people who would like to run for a four year term instead of a two year term.

Commissioner Frink stated that the diversity of the Town of Groton is well-served by a robust RTM, and he equated trying to fix the Town Council to a broken wheel.

Chair Hauber stated that she thinks a four year term is better than a two-year term.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that usually the Council is more divided than it is currently. She questioned the practicality of getting people to agree on goals when there is more of a division. She stated that divisions may occur within parties and ideologies.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that identifying goals could be incorporated into elections.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that it is grass roots politics, and after the election, everyone is concerned about the community. She stated that she would like to see the Town do what is right for the Town.

Commissioner Frink stated that when he was on the Town Council, divisions did not really occur between parties but rather based on who agreed with the Town Manager and who did not. He stated that he would like to see goals connected to the budget process.

Commissioner White stated that the Town of Groton cannot afford to not have goals. She stated that Groton needs to create a brand that will attract businesses and people. She stated that investment in Groton is essential.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she agrees that once an election is over, divisions are passionate but are not dictated by party line. She proposed adding the following language to section 7.2 of the Town Charter: "Shall prepare and submit to the Council an annual budget which reflects the Council's approved goals."

Commissioner Kotowski stated that section 3.5.3 of the current Town Charter, Conflict of Interest, should be added to the "Parking Lot".

Commissioner Granatosky asked if the Commission is tying the hands of the Manager by including Commissioner Dauphinais' proposed language.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Town Manager should create a budget that reflects the Town Council's goals.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she agrees with Commissioner Dauphinais.

Commissioner White stated that the Town Manager and his team should identify where cuts should take place.

The Commission discussed where to include information on the budget and goals in the Town Charter.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that one of the reasons he looked at a Board of Finance is because it looks at revenues, and that is important to look at with respect to the State of Connecticut's finances.

Commissioner Chase stated that she did research on the occupations of the RTM members. She stated that currently there is nobody on the RTM that has a finance background.

Commissioner Frink stated that a Board of Finance is on the table. He noted that having a couple of members with a finance background could help the Board understand interest rates, etc.

Commissioner Mello stated that people who are attracted to a Board of Finance would be interested in volunteering for it. He noted that people who do not have a financial background could be on the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Board of Finance is a good idea. She stated that people on the RTM who do not have a financial background should not be dismissed, and there is a lot of opportunity to learn about the budget.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that the Board of Education may need a separate referendum. She noted that the Board of Education accounts for 60 percent of the budget.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that goals could be extended to the education budget.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Town Council cannot control the Board of Education because Connecticut General Statutes guarantee its autonomy.

Commissioner Frink noted that the education budget goes through the Board of Finance in the town of Glastonbury, and he stated that honest revenue projections could be made by a Board of Finance,

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the RTM and Council look at the entire budget and question line items.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that the cost of education to the Groton taxpayers is evolving and changes because of the cost of sending students to magnet schools.

Commissioner Frink stated that goals should be formed with public input. He stated that currently the Town Manager creates the budget without public input.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that starting the budget process earlier could enable Groton to have a referendum.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that Commissioner Frink has a more pessimistic view of the Council than she does, and that is because of different people who served, and she noted that both he and she are right. She stated that there can be a strong Town Manager, Mayor, and Councilors who understand goals. She stated that it is normal for a Manager to know that if he or she does not meet established goals, his or her job is in jeopardy. She stated that she cannot imagine a body of forty or fifty people doing policy.

Commissioner Frink stated that he cannot imagine a group of nine people doing policy. He stated that a legislature has committees. He stated that the institution of the RTM has value because it has the committees and does the heavy lifting.

Commissioner Mello stated that he is looking at efficiency and numbers, and if the present members of the Council are not doing their job, then the people should be changed and not the Charter. He noted the Town Manager has his way because the Council lets him.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he agrees with Commissioner Mello to a point. He noted that personalities do come into play. He stated that changing the Charter may not be the way to go.

Commissioner Frink stated that the value of the RTM is that it is elected by district, there is more representation per resident, there is the opportunity for a number of committees. He questioned the value of the Town Council.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that a big plus of the Town Council is that it thinks of Groton as a whole and not the districts. She stated that in the RTM there are times when one section of town is pitted against another. She stated that the Town Council is tasked with thinking of the greater good of the Town, and she cited examples.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that nothing would get done if the members of the RTM were pitted against sections of town. She stated that the RTM exists for the benefit of the whole town, and everything has to go through the RTM.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated it must be difficult to get consensus among 40 people.

Commissioner Frink stated that consensus comes from people who do the work and make the case. He stated that the Town of Groton should not be separated by districts. He stated that it is healthy to have the broad representation of the RTM.

Commissioner Mello stated that he is talking about consolidation and savings in a broader way.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he agrees that there is too much duplication. He stated that the subdivisions need to make changes among themselves, and the leaders need to lead, get the information, analyze how to do what is best for everyone, and sometimes bite the bullet. He stated that the RTM is a good body, but there are certain people who step up to do the hard work. He stated that a referendum was the highest vote getter among the people who voiced concerns to the Commission.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that there will not be support unless everyone has a seat at the table. She stated that right now people feel as if everyone does not have a seat at the Council table. She stated that an argument for maintaining a strong RTM is that people feel as if they have a say in what happens in the Town of Groton.

Commissioner Mello stated that a Council of nine, seven members elected by district and two members elected at large, and a referendum, would represent this. He stated that he is looking for efficiency and to eliminate duplication. He stated that the Councilors' feet are not being held to the fire.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he has heard people say after they voted that the RTM will get it after them, and then the RTM stated that it will give it to the voters through referendum, and that does not do the constituency any favors.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that Town Councilors could be elected by district.

Commissioner Frink stated that a 6 or 7 member Board of Finance would take care of a lot of things the Town Council does, such as looking at revenue, debt, contracts with unions. He stated that in the towns he researched, the RTM does the legislation and sets policy.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that there are supposed to be sub-groups of the Town Council that would look at finance, ethics, Board and Commissions, etc. She noted that now everything goes to the Committee of the Whole.

The Commissioners discussed items that should be included in Chair Pro Tem Aument's status update to the Town Council.

In response to Commissioner White, the Commission concluded that there was an informal discussion on non-resident taxpayers.

The Commissioners discussed the Conflict of Interest section of the current Town Charter.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that town employees should be forced to recuse themselves from anything that appears to be a conflict of interest. She stated that she would like to change the language from "shall" to "must" so that Town and Board of Education employees must recuse themselves from voting on budgets that directly impact them.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that "shall" means "must."

Commissioner Kotowski stated that the Charter is our Constitution, and with respect to Town Clerk Moukawsher's memo about end of year transfers, the Charter's language is not being followed.

Commissioner Granatosky clarified that if an individual on the RTM is not following the Charter, there is a process to deal with that situation through the Rules and Procedures Committee.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that in the past when a question was raised about a member of the Town Council voting on a budget that affected him or her, a legal opinion was obtained.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Town of Groton's laws can be more stringent than State Statute.

Commissioner Kotowski suggested that stricter language could be added to the Charter.

Chair Pro Tem Aument reviewed section 7-479 of the General Statutes regarding Conflict of Interest.

Commissioner Mello stated that it is up to individuals in government to know the Charter and to call-out individuals who do not follow the Charter.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Commissioner Granatosky stated that we do not vote on pension money.

Commissioner Frink stated that during his time on the Council, they did not find people to join the Ethics Commission to finish the Ethics Ordinance.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Ethics Ordinance is with the Town Attorney.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Town Charter states the Ethics Commission will be appointed by the Council.

Chair Pro Tem Aument read a memo from Councilor Antipas regarding the Ethics Code.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that it would be simpler if the Charter stated that Town employees and Board of Education employees cannot serve on the Council or RTM or elected or appointed office, and that would eliminate the need for an Ethics Commission most of the time.

Commissioner Granatosky asked what other towns do locally in allowing employees to serve.

The Commissioners discussed the conflict of Town/Board of Education employees, and/or spouses, serving on elected/appointed committees/commissions.

Commissioner Mello asked if something is in the Charter, can Councilor Antipas have a say in whether it should be followed or not.

Chair Pro Tem Aument proposed researching Boards of Finance for the next Charter Revision Commission meeting.

Parking Lot:

- Town Council 4 year staggered terms
- Town Council NBR?
- Town Council goals to be reflected in Town Manager proposed budget
- Must follow Charter language
- Ethics Ordinance/Commission
- Town employees voting yes or no

V. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Mello, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais. The motion carried unanimously by a vote of 10-0-0.

Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Attest:

Scott Aument
Secretary