

TOWN OF GROTON  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
DECEMBER 19, 2016  
TOWN HALL ANNEX—COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Pro Tem Scott Aument, Commissioners Kathy Chase, Jane Dauphinais, Robert Frink, Patrice Granatsoky, Rosanne Kotowski, Daniel Mello, and Jennifer L. White

Absent: Chair Dee Hauber, Commissioners Marley and Peruzzotti

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Mello, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais, to approve the minutes of the December 05, 2016 meeting.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher stated that the recording from the December 05, 2016 meeting would be checked to verify if the word “revenue” was used in paragraph six, page three, of the minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

- a. Chair Pro Tem Aument announced that the Town Manager will be retiring in March.
- b. Secretary
- c. Members

Commissioner Frink stated that he had a brief telephone conversation with the Chair of the Glastonbury Town Council regarding the Town Council’s interaction with the Board of Finance. He announced that he had coffee with Mayor Flax, and he stated that the Mayor had suggested that a lawyer start to attend the Charter Revision Commission meetings.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Mayor suggested having a separate lawyer than the Town Attorney.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the original budget for the Charter Revision Commission was \$7,000. She stated that the Town Attorney charges \$150 an hour.

Commissioner Kotowski questioned the purpose of having a lawyer attend meetings before anything is decided.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that it would be an expensive waste of time until the Commission has something decided and there is language to run by the attorney.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that it is too early to have an attorney attend the meetings.

Commissioner White stated that she recommends not using the Town Attorney so there is an un-bias view.

Commissioner Frink stated that is it important to think about the form, fit, and function of the end product.

Commissioner Mello raised a point of order. He noted that there is a lot of good new information being shared. He stated that he thought information would be sent a week in advance, and he questioned how the Commission will be proceeding with the timeliness and method of communication.

Commissioner Frink clarified that the deadline for sending new material is 24-hours in advance of the next meeting.

Town Clerk Moukawsher reviewed the responses she received from various towns regarding allowing employees to serve on boards, commissions, and in elected offices.

#### IV. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Government Structure
  1. RTM
  2. Board of Finance
  3. Referendum

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she feels Groton would not be best served by a referendum. She stated that the government in Groton is too big and complex. She stated that from the standpoint of timing in the budget process, it is problematic to have a budget referendum. She noted that the special election for a budget referendum would need to occur in the spring, and special elections tend to result in low turnout and draw more people who are "no" voters versus "yes" voters. She noted that there are many critical functions of the Town government that have no public support or awareness, such as the sewer treatment plant, road maintenance, the fleet fund, the computer fund. She stated that she does not want to reduce it to a political campaign.

In response to Commissioner Dauphinais, Commissioner Kotowski stated that recent ordinances for the sewer treatment plant and roads passed, so Groton voters are aware of what infrastructure needs to be maintained.

Commissioner Frink stated that having a budget referendum should be left to the voters, and it would be wrong to deny them the chance to decide this. He noted that historically there was interest in a budget referendum. He stated that he would support a triggered referendum for an appropriation that increases by 2.5 percent over the previous year.

Commissioner Mello stated that Groton is in the middle of the road with a population of 40,000. He stated that a lot of people want a referendum, but when you look at voter turnout, it tells you something else. He noted that it comes down to special interests on both sides. He stated that he likes a triggered referendum. He noted that true democracy can be messy, and if a

referendum is extended to the community, the community at large may not have an interest in voting or an understanding of the budget. He stated that things will turn around with the hiring at Electric Boat, and the Town needs to protect its investments otherwise the community will not be able to grow. He concluded by noting that he supports a referendum with a trigger.

Commissioner Granatosky reviewed her correspondence regarding Public Act 15-244. She stated that within the Public Act there is a provision for a loss of State funding if a Town budget increases more than the rate of inflation or 2.5 percent, so a referendum would be redundant. She stated that if a referendum provision is included in the Charter, in general you will see people that want to see reductions and may not be looking to protect infrastructure, schools, and the educational system. She noted that she is opposed to a budget referendum, and she likes that there is a Council and a RTM; they spend a lot of time analyzing the budget and vote for things that are good for the community.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Kotowski stated that the 2.5 percent has nothing to do with revenue, and if revenue declines and the budget does not increase, such as in a level-services budget, taxes will still increase. She stated that a referendum would be used to control spending. She stated that she supports a blanket referendum, but she would be willing to compromise for a referendum with a trigger. She noted that the voters recently supported an \$184,500,000 referendum, so that proves they are informed and educated on the budget.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that protecting things in the Town is a good idea. He stated that the process, the government, has been inefficient. He stated that he supports the hiring at Electric Boat. He noted that he would like to replace the RTM with a Board of Finance, and it can help the Council with the budget. He stated that he supports a budget referendum with a trigger and a threshold for voter turnout to make the referendum valid. He stated that if the budget fails at referendum, he would like it to go back to the Board of Finance and the Town Council with help from town staff. He stated that the amount of money that a referendum costs is below what it will save the Town in efficiencies. He stated that the Bozrah Board of Finance does grant approvals and selects the auditor every year.

Commissioner White stated that she is on the fence for a referendum because of cost. She stated that she would like to make a decision on the Board of Finance and RTM first.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that many people go into this issue wanting more efficiency and less redundancy with the budget process. She stated that if there is a referendum in the process, then there is no need for a RTM or a Board of Finance. She stated that there is a Board of Finance or a Town Manager, not both. The Board of Finance, or Town Manager, works with Department Heads to develop a budget and then sends it to a Council or Board of Selectman. She stated that the Commission needs to decide on a referendum first.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she likes that there are professionals on staff in the Town who have studied information and are looking out for what is best for the Town. She stated that the information contained in the financial summaries distributed by Commissioner Frink is available in the beginning of every budget book. She stated that there is no need for a Board of Finance of amateurs to make projections. She stated that we want professional people to make

assumptions on the budget. She referenced her attempts at a previous meeting to put breaks in the budget referendum, but they failed.

Commissioner White stated that she agrees that there needs to be professional staff in the Town of Groton. She stated that she thinks there needs to be a Board of Finance to look to the future of Groton and revenue. She stated the Board would be small and would have a financial background. She stated that somebody needs to look at the budget more strategically than a RTM, and she supports a Board of Finance.

Commissioner Frink referenced an article in a CCM publication relating to Public Act 15-244. He stated that it excludes debt and arbitration, and it is based on receiving State aid that the Town may or may not receive. He stated that his outline is not more government. He noted that there are budget workshops, and the budget would be built upon what the community wants. He noted that the budget referendum would occur only if triggered. He stated that the RTM Finance Committee is not elected, but a Board of Finance would be. He referenced the handouts from the Towns of Darien and Greenwich, and he stated that those reports contain a lot of information that would not be generated from the RTM Finance Committee. He stated that a Board of Finance could look into the issue of calculating retirement pay.

Commissioner Mello stated that Southington has a Board of Finance and a Town Manager. He noted that a triggered budget referendum does not add government. He noted that a Board of Finance with a six-year term would attract individuals who are committed and qualified. He stated that the Town Manager would be needed to oversee the day-to-day functions of the departments, and he does not know how a Board of Finance or a Council could supervise that.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that as a RTM member he found some of the committee meetings were limited. He stated that information needed to be asked for, and there was a rule to go through the Town Manger to get information from departments. He stated that a Board of Finance, or whichever body the Commission chooses, needs to look at revenue frequently. He referenced the loss of revenue from Pfizer and its effect on the Town. He stated that a smaller RTM, or a Finance Board, would need to help the Council. He stated that there have been good things that the RTM has done, but he feels that it has outlived its usefulness. He stated that the Commission owes it to the taxpayers to look to some kind of referendum if the RTM is not working.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that the RTM is elected, and the Finance Committee members are representative of the Town because there is one from every district. She stated that she did not say or represent that the RTM presents the projections and the assumptions on the budget. She stated that the Town staff presents the projections and assumptions on the budget through the budget book, and the RTM uses the budget book when voting on things.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the same information from Darien and Greenwich is in the budget book, and the Council and RTM are supposed to look at the budget book. She stated that it is not possible for a Board of Finance to look at revenue. She stated that revenue estimates on Grand List growth are based off what developers and companies have told the Town, but beyond that, there is nothing to know about the Grand List until February. She stated that State revenues are not known until June. She stated that there is nothing more a Board of Finance can do to zero in on revenue. She stated that economic development is long term, and

the staff is doing a much more aggressive job at it. She stated that you are not just replacing the RTM with a Board of Finance, you are changing the function of the two organizations. She stated that a Board of Finance is up-front and is not needed because there is a professional staff. She stated that the RTM is a check on the Council. She stated that replacing the RTM with a referendum and adding a Board of Finance is redundant and adds to government. She stated that she does not think Groton would attract a good Town Manager with a Board of Finance in the mix.

In response to Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Granatosky stated that the Finance Department, in conjunction with professional staff, looks at the budget and creates the budget book.

Commissioner Chase stated that she agrees with Commissioner Mello in that a six-year term on the Board of Finance would give Board members the opportunity to know the budget inside and out. She stated that she wants a Board of Finance made of a small group of professionals looking at the budget after the Council.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that a third of the RTM is new every term, and based upon her experience, they voted to go along to get along and there was a lot of bullying so certain things would happen. She noted that the RTM did good work this year to reduce the budget to a 3.7 percent increase. She stated that typically the RTM restores things the Town Council eliminates. She stated that if there is not budget referendum, then there should be a RTM because she does not want to have less people involved in government.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she does not see the RTM and Board of Finance playing the same roll. She stated that she sees the Town staff in the role of the Board of Finance, and the RTM as the last step in representing the people. She questioned what the general public will be like if there are elected members of the RTM unaware of what is going on when they attend monthly meetings and have information given to them. She stated that she is a staunch supporter of the RTM.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he thinks the RTM has outlived its usefulness. He stated that stronger people on the RTM tend to take over. He stated that there needs to be a budget referendum if the RTM is eliminated. He noted that he could live with no Board of Finance if there was a non-triggered budget referendum. He stated that a Board of Finance would overstep and take over some of the functions of the Town employees, and he thinks there needs to be an elected official to check that for the people.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that department heads want to maintain the status quo. She stated that she would like to see the Finance Board look for cost efficiencies and monitor revenue. She stated that the Town knew the Pfizer building was going to be demolished and it did nothing.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that it was her understanding that money was put aside the year it was learned that the building at Pfizer was going to be demolished, and the money was spent the next year.

Commissioner White stated that she supports a Board of Finance looking at a budget before the Town Council, and a Board of Finance could be a body that reports to the Town Council.

Commissioner Mello stated that the Council could approve what the Board of Finance proposes, they can amend it, and the Town Manager can appeal to the Town Council for additions that the Board of Finance may have deleted. He noted that there are different provisions in different Charters in various communities.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Finance Committee on the RTM is a shining examples of the RTM, but the problem is that it is too invisible. He noted there needs to be more transparency, which is what a Board of Finance would do. He stated that the budget book is thick, and the information is there, but one needs to go through various chapters to find it. He stated that a report from a Board of Finance would be a succinct, separate document that would be highly visible to dispel misinformation. He stated that the redundancy today is that the RTM and the Town Council use the same fine tooth comb to review the budget; they are doing the same check. He stated that a Board of Finance would be an advisor to the Town Council on the financial status of the Town from citizen to citizen, not staff to citizen. He stated that the Council is the final decision making body on what the Town gets.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Frink stated that we need to have citizens involved and aware of the Town's financial status. He stated that the Town staff does the work, but there needs to oversight by citizens on the financial situation.

Commissioner Granatosky stated the policy making body should be the Town Council, and it should be receiving the professional reports. She stated that she does not want a Board of Finance.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Council needs help, and he referenced the list of referrals of the current Town Council.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Registrar of Voters determines the location and number of voting districts for special elections.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that according to the Registrar of Voters, the price would not change for a special election if voting districts were streamlined.

In response to Commissioner Mello, the Commissioners shared the following information on how they feel about a referendum:

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she would consider a triggered referendum if there was a Finance Board, but she prefers a referendum every year.

Commissioner Chase is in favor of a referendum with a trigger.

Commissioner White stated that she supports no referendum depending upon the Commission's decision on a Board of Finance, but would be willing to consider a triggered referendum.

Commissioner Frink supports giving voters a chance to vote on a triggered referendum based upon a 2.5 percent increase in the appropriation from the previous year. He clarified that expenditures would include debt.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she is not in favor of a referendum. She noted that Groton is too complicated for it, and the public is not educated enough to make good decisions about it.

Commissioner Mello supports a triggered referendum.

Commissioner Granatosky supports no referendum.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that a triggered referendum is a compromise, but the voters should have say. He stated that this country is built on self-government, and he feels people should be given that right and ability. He noted that the voters may not be ready for a budget referendum every year. He stated that the budget process is too complicated, so there should be something in the way of a triggered referendum.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he did not know why he thinks the voters are not ready for a budget referendum every year.

Commissioner Mello stated that he does not think a referendum would be necessary every year.

Commissioner Mello requested that the meeting adjourn by 8:00 p.m. for the upcoming holiday.

The Commissioners discussed topics for the next meeting:

- Referendum

- RTM

- Board of Finance

- Commissioner Dauphinais' suggestions for accountability

In response to Commissioner White, Chair Pro Tem Aument clarified that the target date to make final decisions on government structure is early February.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she will respect the majority opinion of the Commission.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she was surprised to learn information about the way the Town Manager and the Town Council have been working. She stated that the Commission and other people who are not on the Commission are under the impression that the Town Manager has been ignoring Council guidance on the budget, but that is not true. She stated that for the past three years, when the budget is on the agenda, the Town Manager has told the Town Council that it is not helpful for him to be given numerical guidance, a percentage increase in the budget, but it would be helpful for them to tell him what services they want cut. She stated that neither Council has given the Town Manager guidance. She stated that when the elected body has its ear to the ground, it should tell the Manager what they feel the citizenship will bare in terms of a financial burden. The Manager uses his or her professionalism and knowledge to bring a budget to the Council that gets to that number by consolidating, changing of functions of departments, eliminating staff, and privatizing. The Council reviews it, and then it goes to the

RTM and it changes it. She noted that she had this conversation with Mayor Flax, and he agrees. She stated there is less wrong with the structure of the government than there is with the people in it.

In response to Chair Pro Tem Aument, Commissioner Dauphinais stated that the Town staff knows how to get to a certain number, but they are not responsible for telling the Manager what it needs to be.

Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that she would research the technology options available for the Commission's meeting room.

V. Adjournment

Commissioner Mello made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Dauphinais. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Attest:

---

Scott Aument  
Chair Pro Tem  
Secretary