

TOWN OF GROTON
 CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES *DRAFT*
 September 26, 2016
 TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chair Pro Tem Aument called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Chair Pro Tem Aument announced that Chairperson Hauber asked him to run the meeting.

I. ROLL CALL:

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

Members Absent: Commissioner Brandon Marley

II. Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Chair Hauber, seconded by Commissioner Peruzzotti, to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2016 meeting.

Vote: Tabled.

Commissioner Kotowski noted that her name is misspelled on page three of the minutes. She reviewed the last paragraph on page three, and Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that she would listen to the recording of the meeting and would write-out a transcript of that portion of the meeting.

Commissioner White noted the word “goal(s)” is duplicated on page two.

III. Communications:

Chair Hauber thanked everyone for the cards and flowers. She noted that she asked Chair Pro Tem Aument to run the meeting.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that he e-mailed commission members regarding the status of the Ethics code that Councilor Antipas is working on. He stated that he received an e-mail from Mayor Flax requesting a status update on the Charter Revision Commission for the October 11, 2016 Town Council meeting.

Commissioner Marley arrived at 6:41 p.m.

Members Communications:

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she created a Power Point slide defining the problems the Commissioners discussed, and a key to creative problem solving is getting a good grasp on what the problems are through brainstorming. She distributed the report to the Commission members.

Commissioner Mello stated that it makes sense to adjust the agenda to look at what Commissioner Peruzzotti created at this meeting.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that not all Commissioners agree on what the problems are.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that it would be useful to digest Commissioner Peruzzotti’s handout before discussing it.

Commissioner Mello announced that he will be meeting with Mayor Galbraith on October 4, 2016 to discuss consolidation of services.

Commissioner Frink stated that he met with the Chair of the Finance Committee from the Town of Glastonbury.

IV. New Business:

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

Chapter 3 Review (Officers and Elections)

Commissioner Mello stated that he thinks the RTM is outdated, and he does not see a need for that body to exist. He stated that it could be ten years before another Charter Revision could look at the RTM again. He stated that he has heard people on this Commission say that the RTM is valuable, but that it is hard to get members to show for RTM meetings. He stated that if a budget referendum is to be considered then it does not make sense to have a Council, RTM, and a referendum. He encouraged Commissioners to think about how the Town will operate in light of the State's current budget issues. He noted consolidation of services between the Town and City could result in savings. He encouraged the Commission to think big and outside of the box.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that the Commission is looking to provide recommendations to the Town Council for changes to the Charter.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky, Commissioner Mello stated that he would be in favor of a referendum. He confirmed that he supported the Town Council as both the budgetary and policy body, and that the budget should go to referendum.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she wants more people involved in government, and she would not support abolishing the RTM without a budget referendum.

Commissioner Marley stated that he agrees with a referendum to a certain extent. He noted that he does not agree with abolishing the RTM because he believes RTM members are more informed than a majority of the general public.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated he has been struggling with RTM vs. no RTM. He noted that a Board of Finance could be alternative for a budget referendum. He stated that he is inclined to have a Town Council with referendum and to have a Board of Finance to replace the RTM.

Commissioner White stated that she would be open to a Finance/Council if the RTM is abolished.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she likes the idea of a Board of Finance. She stated that the Town Council's job is to set policy as well as decide on a budget. She stated that policy guides should support forward thinking investments for the future. She noted that the budget goes from the Council to the RTM and a lot of the forward-looking proposals gets cut by the RTM. She stated that the Town could have a Board of Finance instead of a RTM, and that she would consider a referendum, but she would be very careful about having a trigger for it.

Commissioner Frink stated that he is in favor of eliminating the RTM and replacing it with a referendum with a trigger. He stated that he favors a Finance Board. He believes that the Town of Glastonbury is a great model.

Commissioner Chase stated she agrees with having a Board of Finance because the budget is complicated and she would like to see experts looking at it. She stated that she favors a referendum with a trigger base on a percent increase.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she would like to see the Town Council represent every district. She stated that seven members could be elected from each district and two members could be elected at-large. She stated that she favors a small appointed for a Board of Finance. She mentioned that some members of Boards of Finance receive stipends in other communities.

Commissioner White stated that she is against a stipend for a Board of Finance.

Commissioner Marley stated that an example of where the RTM cut the Town Council's budget was for \$64,000 line item to upgrade monitors through IT Department's budget. He stated that he feels the RTM is a necessary evil and does not think it should be cut. He is opposed to a Board of Finance because he does not know what will stop a strong Town Manager from controlling a Board of Finance as much as the Town Manger currently controls the Town Council. He agrees with a trigger for a referendum after a RTM approves a budget if it is increased by one or two percent.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she thought the RTM did a good job this year. She stated that she is afraid there will be resistance to a budget referendum if the RTM is still in place because of the timeline. She stated that if there is a will to adjust the timeline, then the Charter could be adjusted to fit a timeline for the Council and the RTM and to allow time for a Budget referendum, with trigger, if necessary.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that she supports the RTM. She reviewed her service to the Town with members. She stated that the RTM represents every part of Town with minority representation rules. She stated that people in neighborhoods voice opinions to their RTM representatives. She stated that people on the RTM spend more time researching the budget than the general public. She stated that no one purchase a budget book for FY2016 nor were there very many views of the budget online. She does not think there should be a Finance Board appointed by the Council because it gives the Council too much power. She stated that she would consider reducing the size of the RTM. She noted that it is important to have more than one voice representing each district.

In response to Commissioner Granatosky's statement, Commissioner Kotowski questioned why anyone would purchase a budget book or research the budget if he or she had no say on the budget. She stated that in the last six referendums, 3 passed and 3 failed. She stated that citizens were well informed before they voted. She stated that if there was a budget referendum then people would be more inclined to research the budget, and she stated that people are paying attention.

Commissioner Mello stated that he appreciates the time people put into the RTM. He questioned why an elected Town Council could not be held responsible for dealing with the budget. He stated that the Town Council needs to be responsible and held accountable.

Commissioner Frink stated that he is moving away from representation by district. He stated the Town Charter reflects the entire Town and should not sustain the divisions that exist. He stated that minority representation could be implemented in different areas for balance, and a town-wide election nets the best of the best.

Commissioner Marley stated that he does not agree with an at-large election, and he agrees with representation by district. He stated that he agrees with Commissioner Mello in that people who get involved want to get involved. He stated that people attend Town meetings and voice opinions, and he believes that if people were moved enough by an issue they would get involved.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that that she believes all boards should be elected by district.

Chair Hauber questioned if a Finance Board would ask the Town Council what it would like to see in the budget.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated the Commission may need to discuss what a Board of Finance does. He reviewed the Town of Glastonbury's form of government and noted that it is the Board of Finance that primarily deals with the preparation of the annual budget.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she could not support adding another layer of budgetary approval in Groton. She stated that adding a referendum would mean something would have to be taken out of the equation. She stated she could support a smaller RTM, possibly half its current size. She stated that it is difficult to come up with good volunteers to serve. She noted that some people are on the RTM because a political party pushed them, but most people who serve want to be there. She stated that it is important to have a knowledgeable and informed check on the Council, such as a smaller Board of Finance.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Board of Finance also checks revenue.

The Commission discussed having an informal vote on eliminating the RTM and decided it was too soon.

In response to Commissioner White, Commissioner Granatosky stated that the RTM is a reduction in size from a larger town meeting, and that the representatives on the RTM represent each district and all people in the Town of Groton.

Commissioner Marley stated that the RTM represents the people. He noted that he believes the RTM was influential and did a good job this year. He stated that the RTM is good because it gets people involved in politics.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that government is not a business. She stated that Government exists to serve the needs of the community. She stated that a Board of Finance should be autonomous from the Town Council, and she likes the autonomy of the RTM.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that she does not remember voting down bonds or ordinances when she was on the RTM. She questioned if the Town needs both a RTM and a Town Council. She stated that she believes in a trigger referendum.

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that there are ways in which government can be more efficient. He stated that there is a learning curve for newly-elected RTM members, and there is a lack of stability in the finance process because of turnover on the RTM. He stated that he supports a budget referendum and is not sure about triggers yet. He stated that there needs to be qualified experts looking at the finances and the budgets.

Commissioner Frink questioned if the Commission can have majority and minority recommendations.

Commissioner Marley questioned if there are enough financial experts in town who would donate time to the Town of Groton versus taking paid positions.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that a learning curve in understanding how town government works is an argument in favor of a RTM versus a referendum.

Commissioner Frink stated that the members of the Board of Finance in Glastonbury are not all financial experts.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that only five or six people are needed for a Board of Finance. She stated that there are financial experts in the Town that could serve on a Board of Finance. She stated that the end of April and May would be the budget time with the Finance Board would be busy.

In response to Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Frink stated the Board of Finance has a heavy work schedule during budget time, and that the Board should meet once a month.

Commissioner Dauphinais stated that she believes that the representation of Town on the RTM is a good thing. She questioned if representation rules could be applied to the Town Council and if a Board of Finance could be made-up by skillset instead of geography.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that when Pfizer demolished the building, nobody in the Town did anything. She stated that a Board of Finance may be a good tool to go to the Town Council to say something has to be done regarding loss of revenue.

Commissioner Granatosky stated that policy decisions should have been made when Pfizer was planning to demolish the building. She stated that policy matters are the Town Council responsibility, not a Board of Finance.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she thought that a Board of Finance could be a check on the Council.

The Commissioners discussed the potential role of a Board of Finance.

Town Clerk Moukawsher asked if a Board of Finance would be able to interface with the Director of Finance; she noted the RTM cannot.

Commissioner Frink stated that the Glastonbury Board of Finance holds the reins over the Board of Education.

Commissioner Frink proposed that Section 3.3 could be changed to from “The first Tuesday of December” to “The first Tuesday following their election.” He stated that there should not be a lame duck session.

The Commission created the following graph to identify where each member stands on government structure.

CRC	TRIG/REF		TC	RTM	FB	TM
Dan	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Darcy/Jane	Y	N	Y ⁷ DISTRICT 2 AT LARGE	N	Y ^{AT LARGE}	Y
Jenn	N	N	Y ⁷ DISTRICT 2 AT LARGE	N	Y ^{ELECT}	Y
Brandon/Patrice	N	N	Y	Y ^{SHRINK TO HALF}	N	Y
Scott/Roseanne	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Bob	Y	N	Y ⁷ ONLY	N	Y	Y
Kathy	N	N	Y	Y ^{SHRINK TO HALF}	N	Y

TRIG/REF – TRIGGER/REFERENDUM

TC – TOWN COUNCIL

RTM – REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

FB – FINANCIAL BOARD

TM – TOWN MANAGER

Commissioner Frink noted that Commission should review the section of the Charter that addresses when the Town Council and RTM takes office.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that regarding Charter Section 3.3.4 she believed it was not right that the Board of Education candidates were on the ballot twice. She stated that is confusing for voters.

The Commissioners discussed the Board of Education's term limits, vacancy positions, and staggered terms, and they discussed researching State Statutes regarding term lengths.

In response to Commissioner Kotowski, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Ledge Light Health District is a regional board. She stated that elected officials may serve on regional boards.

Commissioner Kotowski stated that she does not think that the Conflict of Interest section is being followed. She stated that the word "shall" should be changed to "must." She stated that people who work for the Board of Education and the Town while serving on the Town Council or RTM vote on the Town and Education budgets.

Commissioner Dauphinais proposed that no Town employee or Board of Education employee be allowed to serve on the RTM, Town Council, or Board of Education. She stated that an employee who serves on the RTM, a potential Board of Finance, or Town Council, would be voting on a budget that impacts them.

In response to Commissioner Frink, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that Town regulations can be stronger than State Statute.

The Commissioners discussed the word "shall" as a discretionary term versus a non-discretionary term.

Commissioner Dauphinais proposed the following language: "Town Employees shall recuse themselves from discussing and voting on their department budgets."

Commissioner Marley stated that he can provide his research on "shall" as being a discretionary term. He noted that the Commission could use language that includes "is non-discretionary."

Chair Pro Tem Aument stated that a discussion of Charter Section 3.5.3 will be on the next agenda, and agreed that term lengths need to be discussed.

Commissioner Frink stated that he proposes seven members for a four year term in Charter Section 3.3.2. He stated that he would like to return to Section 3.5.2, holding multiple offices, at a future meeting.

Commissioner Peruzzotti stated that term lengths need to be discussed.

Commissioner Frink distributed a sample of how proposed changes to the Town Charter should be documented.

V. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Dauphinais, seconded by Commissioner Granatosky. The motion carried unanimously by a vote of 11-0-0.

Chair Pro Tem Aument adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.