

Rules and Procedures Committee

8/31/15

Called to order 701PM

Members Present: Adams, Ambroise, Monaghan

Absent: Baril, Longino

Quorum Declared

Also present: TC Granitosky, Town Clerk Moukawsher, Moderator Conley, Rep. Smith, Rep. Kotowski, Rep. Obrey, Rep. Meyer, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Massett, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Turnbull, Rep. Cini

New Business

Referral 1 Request to convene a charter revision commission

Rep Monaghan stated he checked CT General Statutes regarding amendments to town charters. He believes that that only way legally to have a charter revision would be to have the Town Council declare it or by petition by 10% of Groton registered voters requesting it. The charter is not antiquated because of the recent update in 2008. Personally he does not want a referendum.

Rep Kotowski responded that the referral is doable and it has been done in the past.

Rep Monagan stated the town attorney opinion said a budget cap/tax referendum was not consistent with the town charter and therefore invalid.

Town Clerk Moukawsher mentioned that at the last charter revision a budget referendum initiative was discussed similar to this one. It did not pass.

Rep Turnbull believes that not only does a budget referendum need to be established but a new form of town government that is more effective and useful.

Rep Kotowski stated there was an effort to petition using the 10% of Groton registered voters and she was told it was not possible to have a charter revision commission.

Rep Cini discussed how economics and other things have changed in the town since the recent charter revision.

Rep Swindell stated he served on two charter revision commissions and the best way to establish it would be to send it to the electorate. He is not opposed to a charter revision commission.

Rep Ambroise discussed his reasons for having a charter revision commission. Expenses are determined before the town knows what their actual revenues are. Any decrease in revenue would not change the expenses because that opportunity to reduce expenses is closed. The only remedy that the town has is

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Betsy Markawsher
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to either take revenues from other funds that were not designated for other purposes or increase taxes to the Groton taxpayers. There needs to be a way to be able to look at both sides of the balance sheet.

Moderator Conley spoke that the town manager works at the pleasure of the town council. Town Council can direct the town manager to not fill positions or reduce expenses in town departments after the budget has been past and the fiscal year is in effect. Working together to pare down expenses is possible. Rep Conley reached out the Mayor Schmidt about how to possibly reduce expenses in this year's budget but by charter, the town can only look at revenues after the expenses are passed by the RTM.

Chairman Ambrose mentioned that all town councilors were informed and invited to this committee meeting and only one of the nine did attend.

Rep Smith commented that just because the RTM approves an expense it does not mean it all has to be spent. Shortfalls in revenue are eminent.

Rep Cini stated that she got involved with the RTM because she decided her family is staying in town and would like to be more involved. The town spends a lot of money and there are ways to reel in spending. Refilling retiree positions or looking for better ways to be efficient was a few of her examples.

Town Councilor Granitosky discussed that the 2008 charter revision commission did not support a town budget referendum. Groton citizens do not seem to be disappointed with the town council because many councilors have been reelected. We have a stable community and a stable government and many communities prefer our form of government in comparison to New London which is bucking the trend.

Rep Turnbull is not in agreement with TC Granitosky. Change in government should be thought out to better server citizens and provide accountability.

Rep Massett commented that every budget cycle a public hearing is held. Many that attend the hearing comment stating their support for a particular service education, symphony, library, etc. For the few that do not support particular budget items we need to have people come up with what they can do without in order to reduce expenses.

Rep Heed stated that his job as a room's forecaster demands he looks at all possible areas when coming up with his forecasts.

Rep Kotowski said that when this year's budget was presented, nowhere in the budget document did it state there would be an anticipated tax increase of 8%. She mentioned that former Councilor Cerf had said this at many public meetings that the tax increase was in fact would be more likely based on town expenses and low revenues would be in line with 8%. Former Councilor Cerf was ignored by her colleagues as having inaccurate information.

Rep Obrey said that she believes we do not have the ability to trigger a charter revision. She suggested that we ask our citizens if they want a budget referendum. Also, many people are interested in improving our economic climate in town. The days of a big industry coming to town are not likely in the future. She recommends that we try and focus on business growth of places that are currently in town.

Town Clerk Moukawsher discussed speaking to the council during public comment at their COW meeting to voice concerns and possible solutions.

Moderator Conley discussed how the TC is the legislative body of the town. We as RTM cannot propose ordinances because our job is to approve expenses.

Rep Kotowski asked whether we could form a question to voters of do you support or reject a town budget referendum.

Rep Monaghan stated he has lived in town since the mid 80s and was never interested in the government process. He is now involved and sees the government and budget process to be adequate.

Chairman Ambrose mentioned that his main concern in the budget process is the lack of revenues coming to town. Many officials and town employees knew of declining revenues but were not proactive in trying to adjust budgets based on these financial factors. Pfizer building 118 demolitions had decreased our revenue by 2.5 million dollars yet when a joint meeting was held with Council and RTM, town employees had a hope for the best attitude and did not come up with meaningful solutions to the revenue shortfall. No real accountability or responsibility was taken.

Rep Obrey spoke to the group saying we as a town do not have the money we did before. There is very little done by state and town governments to be proactive. Joblessness makes people move away. Who should be accountable?

Rep Smith stated that the Grand list had dropped by 2.2%. Spending increase have been 2.9 and 2.4 percent in the past two years.

Rep Kotowski noted that voters are engaged in referendums. Big expenditure referendums have brought her constituents to the polls and voted down many in the previous years.

Moderator Conley suggested a joint meeting with the elected bodies in town could be beneficial to increase communication between all.

Town Clerk Moukawsher mentioned a COW meeting is being held September 8, 2015 to discuss the preliminary budget for FYE 2016-2017

Many members discussed the possibility of an advisory question on this year's November ballot. Can a question be put on their asking if citizens support a town budget referendum?

Rep Monaghan cited that the charge of this committee was to see whether or not the RTM can use POI to convene a charter revision. He said that by the CT general statutes he read they could not.

Motion made by Rep Monaghan

The Rule and Procedures Committee determined that the RTM does not have the authority to establish a Charter Revision Commission. The town council may request town council to establish a charter revision commission. 2nd by Ambroise

Motion Fails by Vote 1(Monaghan) in favor 2(Adams, Ambroise) opposed

Discussion continued on an advisory question.

Chairman Ambroise made a motion to request the RTM write a letter to the Town Council to consider including an Advisory Question on the November ballot stating: "Would you support a charter revision in order to establish a town wide budget referendum. 2nd by Adams

Motion passed 2 in favor (Ambroise, Adams) 1 opposed (Monaghan)

Referral 2 RTM agenda addition

Motion made by Monaghan 2nd Ambroise

Motion to amend RTM Rules pursuant to RTM rule 6.4.4: to add to Section 5 "Order of Business" a new item (G) Report on Economic Development, and changing (G-L) as (H-M).

Motion passed unanimously.

Motion made by Monaghan 2nd Ambroise

Motion to Amend Rules pursuant to RTM Rule 6.4.4: Rule 9.4 Power of Initiative Town Section 3.7 should be section 4.5. Also, Rule 9.5 references section 3.8 and should reference 4.6.

This motion is just to edit our rules to match the current Town Charter.

Motion passes unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:58PM

Respectfully submitted by:

Chairman RTM Rules and Procedures Committee Jean-Claude Ambroise