

Draft Report of the Groton Charter Revision Commission

August 14, 2017

Appointing Resolutions

By resolution 2015-0298 on May 3, 2016 the Town Council of the Town of Groton established a Charter Revision Commission “whose membership shall consist of 11 electors of the Town, not more than one-third of whom may hold any public office in the Town, and not more than a bare majority of whom shall be members of any one political party, and that such Commission shall make its report including any proposed revision of or amendments to the existing Charter to the Town Council not later than 16 months from the date of this resolution.”

By resolution 2016-0135 on May 16, 2016 the Town Council set the date for the Charter Revision Commission to make its report to the Town Council to be not later than September 2, 2017 and appointed the following persons, effective immediately, to the Charter Revision Commission:

Scott Aument
Kathy Chase
Jane Dauphinais
Robert Frink
Patrice Granatosky
Dee Hauber
Rosanne Kotowski
Brandon Marley
Daniel Mello
Darcy Peruzzotti
Jennifer Lobrin White

The Town Council further provided lists of Charter Revision items they wanted the Commission to consider. Those lists are provided as **Attachment 1**.

The members of the Charter Revision Commission wish to thank the Town Clerk, Betsy Moukawsher and assistant Nathan Caron for their untiring assistance throughout this process. We would also like to thank all the citizens who spoke at our Public Hearings, Citizens Petitions and sent us written communications for their thoughtful input.

Executive Summary

The Commission first met on May 23, 2016. At this inaugural meeting, Dee Hauber was elected Chairman of the Commission, and Scott Aument was elected Secretary of the Commission. The diverse membership of the Commission consisted of two former Mayors of the Town, four former Town Councilors, four former RTM members and one current member of the RTM and 3 members with no prior experience in Town Government.

The Commission held thirty-one meetings, approximately two each month including two public hearings, one on June 6, 2016 and one on August 21, 2017. Meetings were noticed in advance, open to the public and included a period for citizen comments. The minutes of all the meetings and Public Hearings are available on the Town Web site. (CRC Minutes) **Attachment 2.**

Director of Finance Cindy Landry attended the June 25, 2016 meeting and provided the members with detailed background and answered questions on Groton's budget process and items regarding Town financial management.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger attended the September 12, 2016 meeting and provided his overview of Town Government, suggestions for the Charter Revision and answered many questions.

Mary Ann Jacob, the Chair of the Town of Newtown Legislative Council addressed the Commission at its May 22, 2017 meeting by telephone and discussed and answered questions regarding their budget referendum process.

Resources referenced include the Office of Policy and Management (OPM); the Sacred Heart University publication, "Financial Performance in Connecticut's Municipalities: A Comparison of Manager, Mayor-Council and Selectman Forms of Government"; Office of Legislative Research (OLR); Connecticut School Finance Project, District Reference Groups; City of San Luis Obispo, CA, "Integrating Goal-Setting into the Budget Process"; Government Finance Officers Association

The recommendations resulted from 83 motions that were made and voted on by the members. The list of motions is included as **Attachment 3.**

Finally when revising the Charter with the recommendations, the red-line method was used throughout except for Chapter IX, Budget and Finance, which was extensively re-written. The marked-up Charter is included as **Attachment 4.**

Highlights- Groton Charter Revision Commission Recommendations

The Charter Revision Commission is recommending the changes to Groton's Charter as indicated on **Attachment**

4. The list below contains the more significant changes and is not all-inclusive.
 1. The RTM is to be eliminated upon approval of the revised Charter.

This was approved at the meeting of February 13, 2017 with the vote 7-2-0. Although the subject of the RTM came up many times, the pertinent RTM discussions and debate were held at the following meetings:

 - o Sept 12, 2016 – Town Manager Mark Oefinger provided his input and thoughts.
 - o Sept 26, 2016 – The CRC conducted a straw poll on government structure.
 - o Oct 3, 2016, Dec 10 and Dec 19, 2016 General discussions and debate
 - o Jan 9, Jan 23 and Feb 13, 2017 General discussions and debate
 2. A seven (7) person Board of Finance to be implemented.

This was also approved at the meeting of February 13, 2017 with a vote of 7-2-0. The pertinent Board of Finance discussions and debates were held at the following meetings:

 - o Oct 3, Nov 11, Dec 5 and Dec 19, 2016
 - o Jan 9, Jan 23 and Feb 13, 2017
 - o June 19, 2017 – vote to make the BOF 7 members
 3. The annual budget development process shall be revised to include the following additional elements: Board of Finance, Budget Workshops, Budget Guidance and an Annual Budget Referendum.

The initial vote on this item was taken at the March 27, 2017 meeting, passing with a vote of 6-2-0. The vote was for the overall budget process, leaving the question of an Annual Budget Referendum to a future vote. The flow chart depicting the overall budget process is included as **Attachment 5**. The specific Charter language for the annual budget development process was discussed, debated and voted on at the following meetings: March 27, April 10, April 24, May 8, May 22, June 19, July 10, July 17 and July, 24 2017.

The initial vote on the Annual Budget Referendum was taken at the March 27, 2017 meeting, passing with a vote of 6-2-0. The vote was for a referendum with no conditions, no minimum voter turn-out, no "trigger", and no limit to the number of referendums. Those elements were discussed, debated, and passed by individual votes at the May 22 and June 5, 2017 meetings, approving the following recommendations:

- o The Annual Budget Referendum shall be bifurcated
- o The Town and BOE budgets shall be voted on separately
- o There shall be no requirement for a minimum voter turnout
- o There shall be no limit to the number of referendums, voting until the budgets are approved
- o The ballot asks if NO vote is because you believe that the budget is too high or too low
- o If there is no approved budget by June 30, the previous year's budget is adopted until a new budget is approved

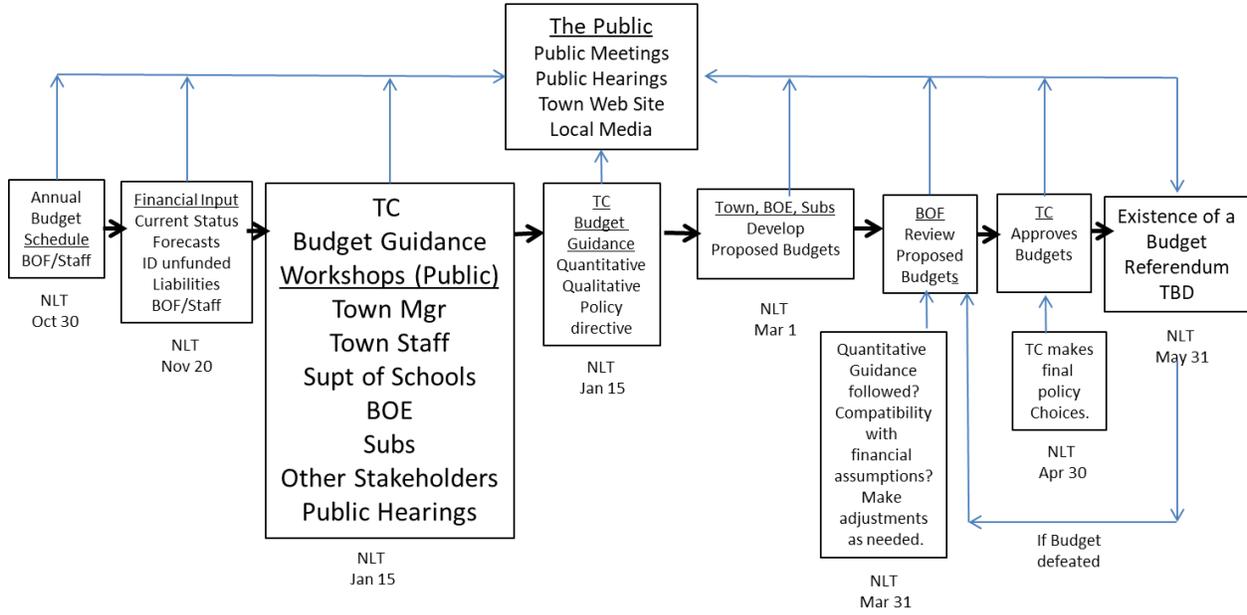
4. Recommended changes related to the Town Council. The meeting dates of the votes are indicated for each item. Discussion and debate on these votes occurred during the meetings in September through December of 2017.
 - The Town Council term of office shall be 4 year staggered – June 19, 2017
 - The Town Council can change Town Attorneys any time by majority vote – June 19, 2017
 - The new Town Councils are seated the first Tuesday after election – June 19, 2017
 - The Town and Board of Education employees are not allowed to serve on Town Council – Sept 17, 2016
 - The number of affirmative votes needed to remove the Town Manager is reduced from 7 to 6. – Feb 13, 2017
 - Town Council members shall be limited to 3 consecutive terms – June 19, 2017.
 - The Town Council shall issue an Annual Report of the Town (not the Town Manager) – June 19, 2017.
 - Upon elimination of the RTM, the CGS minority representation rules shall apply to the Town Council – Feb 13, 2017. (Note this is a change to the charter that is required by the CGS that results from the recommendation to eliminate the RTM).

5. The duties of the Board of Finance shall be to support all fiscal decisions of the Town Council by providing research, data and support to the budget development process as delineated in Chapter IX, including but not limited to the following:
 - Develop the schedule for annual budget development and communicate it to the citizens of Groton
 - Support the budget workshops with fiscal data including a five year financial forecast of spending and revenue
 - Provide input regarding the form of the Board of Education and Subdivision budgets
 - Provide critical analysis and visibility to the Town’s public financial reports

All of these items were voted on at the June 19, 2017 meeting. The pertinent discussion and debate on the Board of Finance occurred on Oct 3, Nov 11, Dec 5 and Dec 19, 2016 and Jan 9, Jan 23 and Feb 13, 2017.

6. Other Recommendations
 - The Town shall have an Ethics Commission and the requirement for an Ethic’s Policy is eliminated in the Charter – July 10, 2017
 - The dollar limit for emergency appropriations is raised from \$75,000 to \$100,000 per occurrence and the limit of one emergency appropriation per year is eliminated – July 17, 2017

Proposed Budget Process Outline Approved 3/27/2017



CRC Draft Report – Attachment 5