

Official

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES Special Meeting Wednesday, January 19, 2011

CALL TO ORDER: Acting Chair Gorton called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

PRESENT: David Boutin, James Gorton, Vincent Lembo, James Levesque, George Longfellow, Nancy VanScoy and Carol Granfield Town Administrator)

ALSO PRESENT: Richard Bairam and James Sullivan (Charter Review Committee members)

EXCUSED: Chairman William Gahara, Daniel Paradis and Michael Pischetola

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

DISCUSSION

Town Charter Review Committee Report

James Sullivan, Charter Review Committee (CRC) Chair presented the Committee's report.

Other members of the committee are, Richard Bairam, Jim Gorton, James Levesque and Carol Granfield. On October 27, 2010, the Town Council adopted the following charge for the committee:

"The Charter Review Committee is charged by the Town Council to thoroughly review the Town's Charter and make recommendations for a complete rewrite of the Charter or a modification of the sections required due to inconsistencies or streamlining of responsibilities for improved efficiency. An initial or final report with recommended changes is requested to be provided to the Town Council by January 26, 2011 so a public hearing can then be held."

The amendment recommendations focus on the following areas:

1. Streamline the Budget process.
2. Clarify the Town Council's role working with the Town Administrator.
3. Streamline Boards and Commissions.
4. Change the Town Meeting from May to March to be held at the same time as the School District.
5. Reduce the number of Town Councilors from nine (9) to seven (7).
6. Change the number of voting districts from six (6) to four (4).

G. Longfellow asked what was the reason behind reducing the Council members from nine (9) to seven (7).

J. Sullivan explained reducing the number to seven brings it back close to how it was when the Town had Selectmen form of government. This would allow for more debate and still provide sufficient liaison. As a previous Councilor who served in the past.

Acting Chair Gorton stated he is a firm believer of small government. This will reduce the annual stipend costs.

With regards to reducing the number of voting district, Acting Chair Gorton noted that a lot of residents don't even know what district they belong to. It will also divide the districts into equal number of voters.

N. VanScoy asked which came first, reducing the voting districts or reducing the number of Councilors.

J. Sullivan stated the committee first considered reducing the number of Councilors to eliminate having districts with no one interested in running as Councilor.

G. Longfellow commented in October, the Council voted to set up a commission to review the Charter. He did not expect the committee to make such extensive amendments. Reducing the number of Councilors increases the size of constituents for each Councilor. He also commented on how changing the Town Election day would affect the budget cycle.

J. Sullivan stated he is also a member of the School Board. The School's budget year runs from July to June. The board is always able to present a budget that meets the needs of the school. In some way, the School has an advantage over the Town because they have "first bite on the apple".

G. Longfellow: If that's the case why can't School move their election to May?

J. Sullivan: The school will be able to find more qualified teachers in March than May. Hooksett is one of very few Towns in NH that holds its Town Election in May.

G. Longfellow: When the Charter was changed back in 1989, a lot of public information was provided. By the time residents voted on it, the voters were educated.

J. Sullivan: We are simply recommending amendments to streamline the process. In 1989, the form of government was changed.

N. VanScoy asked about the change in Planning Board make up.

C. Granfield explained the way it is currently, three (Town Council Rep, Town Administrator and Town Administration Rep) votes could potentially sway something on the Planning Board. Not to say it has happened, the Town Council could sway the Town Administrator to vote one way and the Town Administrator could sway the Administration Representative (Public Works Director) to vote one way. The board could have 3 residents serving as members as opposed to Town Staff.

J. Sullivan added this gives the Council the option to appoint their representatives.

J. Gorton also added the Town Administrator and the Public Works Director are already involved with the planning process as Town staff.

N. VanScoy asked why Section 11.5 was eliminated.

C. Granfield explained

N. VanScoy: What changes are considered necessary to be consistent?

C. Granfield: The Legal Counsel advised Article 4.6.A was in conflict with RSA.

V. Lembo asked, with the changes in Section 3.2, if a current Councilor could be appointed as Police Commissioner at the same.

J. Sullivan: The Section refers to serving in another capacity after leaving a board. The RSA will restrict that.

J. Levesque: The intent of the change is for a former board member not to hold a paid office, such as Town Administrator, etc. This eliminates restrictions on past member to serve on other boards.

J. Sullivan: The change clarifies that a "paid office" does not include stipend.

There was a suggestion to add language to clarify this section.

C. Granfield explained the procedure of amending the Town Charter.

1. The Council accepts the report from the committee.
2. The Council could make further changes/amendments.
3. Public Hearing will be held where additional changes can be made based on public input.
4. Another Public Hearing, if changes were made.
5. The Council accepts the proposed amendments.
6. The proposed amendments will be sent to the Attorney General's office for approval.

N. VanScoy moved to accept the report. Motion seconded by J. Levesque. Motion carried unanimously.

N. VanScoy stated the Council needs to have further discussion on the three major changes, reducing the number of Councilors, reducing the number of Voting Districts and changing Town Election Day.

D. Boutin moved to change Section 3.2 to state, "No Councilor shall, during his/her term and for one year thereafter, be eligible to hold a paid Town employee office. This prohibition shall not apply to a Councilor, who no longer holds an elected office. He/She may be appointed to a Town board or commission for which a stipend is paid. Notwithstanding... Motion seconded by N. VanScoy. Motion carried unanimously.

N. VanScoy moved to change Section 5.4.C from May to March. Motion seconded by V. Lembo. Motion carried unanimously.

D. Boutin moved to schedule the Public Hearing on February 2, 2011. Motion seconded by J. Levesque. Motion carried (4-2). G. Longfellow and N. VanScoy opposed.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Evelyn F. Horn
Administrative Assistant

Vincent F. Lembo, Jr.
Town Council Secretary