

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

The Charter Revision Commission held a regular meeting directly following a Public Hearing in the Council Chambers of the Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT on Wednesday, July 25, 2012. John Godin called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Present: James Ritchie, Robert Hall, George “Nick” Schmidt, John Godin, Allan Song, Anthony Filiato, Michelle Embree Ku, Craig Lehecka

Absent: George Coleman

Also Present: Maryann Jacob, Paul Lundquist, Dan Wiedemann, Dan Honan, Kathy Fetchick and Bob Merola from the Legislative Council, Board of Finance Chairman John Kortze, Debbie Leidlein and John Vouros of the Board of Education, 9 people from the public and 3 people from the press

Absent: George Coleman

Approval of the minutes – Mr. Schmidt moved to accept the minutes from the 7/16/12 meeting with corrections. Gordin should be Godin and also present was Paul Lundquist the Chairman of the Charter Revision Commission nominating committee. All in favor

Mr. Godin explained that they have invited members from other boards to get their opinions and ask what they can do to make things better.

Maryann Jacob, 64 Mohawk Trail - Vice Chair of the Legislative Council, speaking on her own behalf, not for the Legislative Council, gave the commission many questions to scenarios on bifurcation and advisory questions. Such as if one side passes and the other side doesn't, is the side that passed binding? She also questioned how debt service will be handled. Currently it is on the Selectman's side. If a voter is concerned that the Town is borrowing too much, they may vote no to the Selectman's side. She is also concerned about collaboration between business units such as Park & Rec, Public Works and BOE maintenance. She doesn't want to see either side get hurt.

Only 20% of the people answering advisory questions would not be as helpful as if all the no votes answered it. The Legislative Council said that they would not put money back into the BOE. Vote No because it is too low is a new. Traditionally, no means too high. If the detailed advisory question is town too high, too low, is the BOE too high or low, what is the difference than bifurcating?

First Selectman, Pat Llodra – Gave a hand out and asked that people look at the budget in three parts. There is the municipal service, Board of Education and debt services. It is her position that the operational budget be separate of the debt services. Bifurcation does clarify, but if the municipal side passes is it binding? Advisory questions do give you some insight to voter's intent but it is not binding. How much to increase or decrease is still a question. She is concerned about any format other than the current format. It provides a platform for special interest and strongly discourages collaboration. This past budget season has persuaded her that one town, one budget may not be possible. It was unhealthy for the town. There needs to be more clarity.

A suggestion from Mr. Schmidt was to take out debt services from the budget so people are only voting on the Board of Education and municipal services. Mrs. Llodra explained that routinely, we have had a problem in Newtown passing the budget on the first try.

Mrs. Llodra stated that when she was on the Board of Education, they did not favor advisory questions. There is a strong value around education in our community. Politics have not changed much, what has changed is the stress about taxation. The only place you can do anything about it is at the local level.

Debbie Leidlein, 29 Little Brook Lane – Chairman of the Board of Education, her opinions are her own and not that of the BOE. She said that she echo's many concerns that Maryann Jacob had. The recent Bloom Shapiro report on calibration will have to be looked at in retrospect to each budget. Advisory questions, being too high or too low are good, but the question is still how much, the council will still have to make a judgment to that question.

John Kortze, 25 Hundred Acres Road – He is not going to weigh in as to what would be best. Politically this is beyond the Board of Finance's purview. If the budget is going to be separated, you need to know how the debt services will be separated. If the recommendation is to split the budget, an option could be to put the major projects such as a bridge or an addition be put on the ballot. Those elected should be able to make some of the decisions. Where does the fund balance come in? It affects the rate of interest the town pays which could result in a 20 year price tag. There are a lot of shared services, how is that handled and how do you deal with it.

Dan Honan, 68 Main Street – He is new to the Legislative Council this year. He is of the opinion that whatever the Charter Revision Commission does will help them out.

Paul Lindquist, 164 Currituck Road – His opinions are his own and not that of the Legislative Council. One general comment is providing a clear voice to the voter. This will give the council a clear way to go. We are not the only ones going down this path, researching other towns that have gone through this may help.

Robert Merola, 22 Ashford Lane – He is a member of the Legislative Council but speaking on his own behalf. The amount of people voting is a concern. What impact did voter participation have when other towns bifurcated? He is trying to get people to understand that the reduction in the Board Of Education budget is from better numbers. If both budgets started at a reasonable amount, there would not be as many referendums. If there is more voter participation, there would be a better budget.

Dan Weidemann, 13 Good Year Drive – He is a member of the Legislative Council. One of his biggest issues as a new member of the Legislative Council is a lack of feedback. He is for the advisory questions because they need to know what everyone is thinking. The desire to put teeth into the questions could mean a lot more questions on the ballot to know what way to go.

Mr. Godin asked the commission what have they learned tonight. Researching other towns that have bifurcated, collaboration, how debt services should be handled and do no harm were echoed by most.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 7th. Tentative dates for the next two meetings are August 14th, 16th and 20th. All regular meetings will be at 7:30pm and public hearings will be held at 7pm.

Voter Comments - Elizabeth Lincoln, 34 Echo Valley Road – she has not had children go through the school system. The school budget was so out of line. The previous school board has lost the trust. The new school board has gotten the message. The Board of Finance was created and they have done a great job for the town. The town needs to respect their judgment. They should allow the elected officials to run the town. If they are not happy with the budget, they should feed the information to their district representative. What this commission is doing is a knee jerk reaction.

Having no further business, meeting was adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Arlene Miles
Clerk