

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

The Charter Revision Commission held a regular meeting Tuesday, August 7, 2012 at the Senior Center, 14 Riverside Road, Sandy Hook, CT. Chairman Godin called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

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

Absent: Anthony Filiato

Also Present: Two member of the press and three member of the public

Voter Participation: Dave Montgomery, 49A Flat Swamp Road – He had meet with a former First Selectman of Ridgefield and asked how the process works in Ridgefield and discussed the question of knowing how do you know what people are thinking if you don’t ask questions. Mr. Montgomery and his wife are in favor of charge put to the Charter Revision Commission. People are looking for a realistic approach. If the budget can be broken into three pieces, the BOE, the Town and the capital, there would be better voter participation in town. He fully supports education and feels that that is key in moving forward however transparency is needed. If we do not do bifurcation or something else, will the divisiveness in town get worse? He also suggested greater detail in the budgets. They need to show what they are spending, why it is going to cost what it does and what the benefits are. Saying that we have to do this or education will suffer, we have to do this or roads will suffer, prove it.

Approval of the minutes – Mr. Schmidt moved to accept the minutes from the 7/25/12 meeting with corrections, Ms. Embree Ku seconded.

- George Coleman is listed twice in different areas as being absent.
- In the 3rd paragraph 5th line down, the word barrowing should be spelled “borrowing”.
- In the next paragraph Maryann Jacob did not state that the Legislative Council said that they would not put money back into the BOE.
- In the next line of that same paragraph after “new” should be the word concept.
- In that same line the sentence “If the detailed advisory question is town to high, to low, is the BOE to high or low, what is the difference than bifurcating?” Should be changed to “She asked what the difference would be between detailed advisory questions and bifurcation in terms of divisiveness.

All in favor

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion on voter comments: None

Discussion on research conducted by commission members: Mr. Coleman explained that he and Ms. Embree Ku spoke officials from Windom, CT about advisory questions. They seemed to be skeptical and felt the questions created confusion and it could restrict the process. Advice itself is important but on the ballot it is confusing. They have the ability to do the advisory questions but do not use them. They have a bifurcated budget and have a Charter Revision Commission in place looking into combining their

budget back to a single number. They are thinking that would bring the town together. In 2010 they went through 5 referendums with a split budget.

Ms. Embree Ku spoke with Naugatuck. They have a very different process than we do. They pass a budget at a town meeting and that stands unless there is a petition for a referendum. She also looked into Lebbon. They do not have a bifurcated budget but they do have advisory questions for both the BOE and Town. The Town Clerk expressed that the residents are confused by the questions. They are voting on one budget so when they ask is the BOE too high or too low, the question does not clarify the amount of that side of the budget.

Mr. Schmidt looked at the history of Newtown. Since fiscal year 1995 there were no advisory questions. It appears that back in the 80's, Newtown put advisory questions on the ballot. A single budget, if it fails, do you want to raise or lower the BOE or Town. In the 90's, the Secretary of the State said that this was not legal. Fiscal year 94 (took 3 referendums to pass) the question asked if this total budget number too high or too low. In 2006-2007 there was a Charter Revision Commission which unanimously rejected any advisory questions. In 2010, the Charter Revision Commission rejected splitting a budget but did approve too high or too low advisory question.

Mr. Hall contacted New Milford and Simsbury. New Milford does not have a truly bifurcated budget. If one of the budgets fails, they both fail and go back to where they started. The chairmen of the BOE in both towns were in favor of bifurcation. There is an underlying competition with the elements of the town. Simsbury does have a truly bifurcated budget and have questions on the ballot. Mr. Hall explained that the problem with the question that the previous Charter Revision Commission in Newtown came up with is that doesn't give the people who voted yes the opportunity to say too high or too low. If it goes back the people who vote yes they vote no the next time around. In Simsbury, the BOF determine the advisory questions. They could put on capital projects or retiring debt as questions.

Mr. Lehecka expressed that they cannot bring everyone together, all they can do is put a tool out there. They are tasks with getting the Legislative Council more information. He is struggling with what they can do in this short period of time. Mr. Godin said that this is an imperfect science. He has seen comments where people think there is a predetermined outcome. We are looking at advisory questions or a split budget, it was never suggested that they look back at what the last Charter Revision Commission came up with.

Mr. Ritchie looked at Madison. They have a bifurcated budget and no advisory questions. All that he spoke to were not in favor of advisory questions. They are unique because the BOE and the Town do a lot of sharing, shared Director of Finance, shared IT, shared janitorial and more. They feel they are successful because of their collaboration. The BOE and the Selectman present their budget together. They tend to support each other's budget. They have only had one budget defeated in the last 10 years or so. If there are advisory questions, they should not come in the way of allowing the electing officials do their job.

Mr. Song looked at Watertown who has a nonbinding bifurcated budget since 2010. If one fails, they both fail. The last two years, the budget passed on the first time. Before that it was it was many times.

The towns' business manager said that he and the superintendent completed a political informal process of vetting each other's budget. If he cannot explain and defend all the money being spent, he cannot defend it.

Mr. Godin explained that less than 30% of the registered voters vote so you are not getting the real feeling of the people.

Discussion and possible action on specific charge from Legislative Council: NONE

Confirm next meeting dates/final public hearing: Tuesday, August 14, 2012 at 7:30pm, a public hearing on Thursday August 16, 2012 at 7:00pm followed by a regular meeting. If needed, there will be a meeting on Monday, August 20, 2012 at 7:30. All meetings and public hearings will be held at the Senior Center, 14 Riverside Road, Sandy Hook, CT

Voter Participation –

John Moran, 8 Newfield Lane – He explained that his observation is that they (the CRC) have talked to a lot of town officials in a lot of towns. What they have found is that they do not like questions because it ties their hands. He is not surprised because the people who are in those positions would like to make the decisions without much input. Mr. Godin explained that his interpretation is that the people that who are not in favor of the questions, was because they did not work and cause more confusion. Where there is definite concern is to make a split budget binding. That will tie elected officials hands.

Bob Neilson, 12 Lantern Drive – From the discussion interpreted that Mr. Hall is in support of bifurcated budget with no advisory questions. Mr. Hall replied that advisory questions do not give the full picture.

Announcements: NONE

Having no further business, meeting was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.