

CITY OF STAMFORD 17TH CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

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MINUTES OF MEETING

Wednesday, February 1, 2012

7:00 p.m. – Republican Caucus Room

4th Floor, Government Center

888 Washington Boulevard, Stamford, CT 06904-2152

Co-Chair Sandak called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Co-Chair Sandak, Co-Chair Freccia and Commissioners Fedeli, Grebey, Gwozdzowski, Jachimczyk, Lucas, McManus, Nabel, Okun, Robins, Roseman, Sessa, Sherer and Williams. Also present was BOR member Mary Fedeli.

Public Comment - There were no members of the public present who wished to make comments

Committee Reports

1. Communications Committee

Commissioner Grebey stated that the Commission is not yet on the public radar, but they will increase coverage as the Commission gets closer to issuing its report. The Commission has not received many e-mails from the public.

2. Governmental Committee

Co-Chair Freccia stated that the committee has met 5 times and has gone through 30 items under the following general categories.

WPCA – The committee met with the WPCA board, the engineer, and reviewed a legal opinion that the WPCA is a quasi-governmental entity. They will continue to discuss this.

Corporation Counsel's Office – The committee spoke with former Corporation Counsels Larobina and Cassone and former Director of Administration Flynn. They will continue to investigate whether Human Resources should be under Legal Affairs.

Boards and Commissions – The committee will discuss possible changes to Board and Commissions further. Changes to the Fire Commission may depend upon changes to the Charter recommended by the Public Safety Committee.

Other issues being examined include: timing for Board of Representatives meetings; Mayor's functions and timing; who Chief Building Official reports to; whether the Board of Representatives should be part of the approval process for Special Assistants; raising the bar for Board/Commission appointments; term limits; limits on serving on two elective boards; and the size of the Board of Representatives.

Mr. Vartuli has recommended that the Charter include a Citizen's Bill of Rights, similar to the State's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, which the committee has been discussing.

3. Financial Committee

Commissioner Scherer reported that the committee has met 4 times and has 4 broad categories of issues:

Budget Process – The committee is trying to streamline this process and avoid repetitive presentations before multiple entities. They have looked at how far out the City can budget while recognizing that the City should not be locked in because the economy may change. They plan to meet with the Board of Representatives and the Board of Finance to discuss this further.

Bonding – The committee spoke with Bond Counsel and Pete Privitera. There are two ways of addressing bonding – a general authorization, in which the Chief Engineer then assigns funds based upon necessary priorities, or project specific bonding, in which the Board of Finance manages which specific projects get funding. The latter process doesn't allow for emergency projects. Currently there is a two step process of authorization and issuance and both steps must be approved separately, requiring 2 separate presentations for 1 project. This is not required by the Charter. Bond counsel will review the Charter for any changes they might recommend. They plan to meet with the Board of Representatives and the Board of Finance to discuss this further.

Pension Plans – The committee met with representatives from all 4 pensions. The pensions are governed by state law and provisions in collective bargaining agreements supersede the Charter. The only issue to address in the Charter is the makeup of the boards. One possibility is to allow the Mayor to appoint a designee. All 4 pensions have outside investment advisors they are happy with and send their board members for pension education. They are still looking at the issue of whether the Boards should include members with investment or financial expertise.

4. Public Safety & Health/Education/Ethics Committee

Co-Char Sandak reported that although this committee has the fewest issues, they are all meaty.

Ethics – The committee had a general discussion about whether the Charter should require an Ethics Commission. The Code of Ethics is legislative and should remain in the Code. The committee spoke with the former head of the Ethics Commission. They are discussing how independent the Commission should be and what its make-up would be.

Health Commission – The current practices regarding the roles of the Health Commission and the Health Director are inconsistent with the Charter, for example, policy decisions are coming from the Director, not the Commission. They are seeking to make the Charter consistent with practice and State statutes.

Board of Education – The committee will begin to look at these issues next week, particularly the partisanship of the election process and funding issues.

Fire Service – This is the biggest issue the Commission will have to deal with. Co-chair Sandak explained the evolution of the career and volunteer departments and chiefs and the current issues created by having a combined, autonomous fire service. The Charter divides the City into 12 fire service districts, 7 of which are served by Stamford Fire and Rescue and the other 5 of which are served by volunteer departments. The Board of Representatives may change these districts by a 2/3 vote. Beginning in 1999, the City began to provide paid firefighters to the volunteer departments to ensure staffing, paid by Stamford Fire and Rescue, through management agreements. (Except to Long Ridge which has always had its own paid firefighters.) The volunteers receive funding through the City budget process for operations. In 2006-7, the City decided to remove the paid firefighters from the volunteer stations and to reduce budgets for the volunteer houses and terminated the management agreements. There is currently a wide diversity among how the different fire departments work

There have been multiple lawsuits between the volunteers and the City of Stamford regarding authority and control issues. Some of these are still pending. Both career and volunteer firefighters respond to emergencies, with whoever arrives first acting as incident commander until there is a handoff, which works smoothly. All firefighters have the same threshold of training, but subsequent training is not uniform. The City has commissioned two studies on the fire service, one in 1995 and one in 2008. The 2008 study identifies problems in the service which are traceable back to the Charter language and recommends a combined, unified fire service.

The committee invited the union representatives and all of the fire chiefs to it meeting. The issues for the committee to address are autonomy, authority and control; whether a unified fire service is in the best interests of the City and how that

would be manifested; and issues created by having more than one fire marshal in the City. The committee is committed to making recommendation that is not divisive to the community as a whole and to permit the City to figure out a structure that makes a solution by the City possible. They have discussed beefing up the role of the Director of Public Health and Safety, but that person may not have fire expertise, and the role of the Fire Commission.

Review and consideration of Technical Issues to be considered by Commission as a whole

This item was held.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the January 4, 2012 meeting was made, seconded and approved by unanimous voice vote.

Scheduling of Next Meeting

The next full commission meeting will be held on March 7, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Submitted by,

Jay Sandak, Co-Chair

This meeting is on [video](#).