


**TOWN OF CROMWELL
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
June 29, 2022
7:00 p.m., Town Council Chambers
Minutes**

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
Jul 06, 2022 02:38P
JoAnn Doyle
TOWN CLERK
CROMWELL, CT



Present: Chairperson Jennifer Lepore, Ann Grasso, Mike Cannata, Lou Menendez,
Marie Roberto, Geoff Oryell, Phil Gagnon

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Lepore called the Public Hearing to order at 7:05 p.m., and read the Legal Notice:

Notice is hereby given that the Cromwell Charter Revision Commission, pursuant to the requirements of Section 7-191 of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended, will hold a Public Hearing on the current Charter of the Town on Wednesday, June 29, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall Council Chambers, 41 West Street, Cromwell, Connecticut 06416. The Commission is seeking input on any possible changes to the Charter and on the revisions recommended to the Commission by the Town Council. Any person wishing to comment is invited to speak at this hearing.

Jennifer Lepore, Chairperson
Charter Revision Commission

B. PUBLIC COMMENTS

John Ireland, 12 Crest Drive, Chairman of the Board of Finance, addressed some of the items on the Charter Revision Commission Highlights (Attachment 1).

Mr. Ireland has some concerns and questions regarding the proposal of the Board of Finance changing terms from six years to four years. He believes one of the rationales behind it was that there may be more of an ability to get people to run. Campaigning is hard and it takes a lot of time. From my perspective, one of the attractive parts of running and going for this, was that the term was six years. I can really work with my fellow members of the Board and can look at both short and long-term for the town. If it's a standpoint of getting more people to run, I see that as a downside. Also, the Town Council is being looked at to expand their terms. If the rationale is trying to get more people to run, shouldn't it stay at two years instead of adding years on? I'm a little confused as far as one side of the house looking at one way vs. the other.

Chairperson Lepore addressed Mr. Ireland's concerns regarding the rationale behind the change of terms. Regarding the Board of Finance terms, you are absolutely correct as to the reasoning that if it were less of a term, perhaps more people would be interested. But we did also consider your point that campaigning is hard, that's why we look at the very short term of two years for Town Council, and look at increasing it to four.

We absolutely get your point in having that six-year term for the Board of Finance; having the ability to see the long-term effects and having it perhaps not be so politicized.

Mr. Gagnon agrees with Mr. Ireland that there is inconsistency and suggested that perhaps the Commission can discuss this further. In terms of candidate retention, I'm speaking from first-hand knowledge about how difficult it is to get somebody to commit for six years. I understand the point about us building up one's knowledge curve to get to the point where you could feel comfortable with the budget; but on the other hand, you have a lot of individuals that would re-run, whether it's four or six. It's just the initial term to get somebody to step up forward on a six-year term is where we always had difficulties, and being on the Nominating Committee a few times, I saw it first-hand. Lastly, as a Commission, we talked about accountability and we were presented with some scenarios, initially, to maybe eliminate the Board of Finance; I'm not in favor of that. But when you have six-year terms, elected officials are sitting there for a long time. Going from six to four years for the Board of Finance, I'm in favor of, and keeping the Town Council terms at two years vs. four.

Mr. Ireland responded by saying that his personal experience with the Board of Finance has been unique because he was appointed after the 2019 election and then we had to try to pass the budget through Covid. To your point about knowledge and trying to figure out the process, that was my first time going through it - and over Zoom. It takes time to learn, and it's not easy. As Chairman for the last six months, I've been trying to be very conscious of that, especially that we have a lot of new members of the Board now. If it takes you a year or so to get up to speed, then you have two years and you have to do it again.

Ms. Grasso stated that she thinks it is consistent, and the Commission talked about it a fair amount of time. We made the Council to be four years as well as the Board of Finance. Ms. Grasso commended Mr. Ireland on his leadership.

Ms. Roberto thanked Mr. Ireland for coming to the Public Hearing. She asked what he would consider an average term of office for members of the Board of Finance, since he's been on and if he sees any detriment to someone running for several consecutive terms. Mr. Ireland said that some members have been on for a number of years; in addition to some newer people. If you've got someone good, with the knowledge and they can campaign and people want them, that would be my first gut reaction to your question about consecutive terms. We are also very fortunate to have a great, experienced Finance Director.

Mr. Ireland asked about the Commission potentially reducing the membership of the Board of Finance from six to five members. Where he views his role and his committee's role is collaborating and coming up with good solutions, asking good questions and doing what is best for the Town. Taking away a mind that may be able to help us - I'm trying to see where that would benefit us?

Chairperson Lepore responded that that is correct, that the majority of the Commission voted to reduce membership to five, to avoid the three-three tie. Ms. Grasso said that she thinks it was the uneven number that was more of a question mark and asked Chairperson Lepore if it could be revisited in the Commission's following meeting.

Mr. Gagnon asked Mr. Ireland to clarify what passes as an affirmative vote on the Board of Finance. Mr. Ireland said that if it was a three-three, it would not pass. Mr. Gagnon said that part of the rationale of going to five is to make sure the Board is more effective at having only to get the three votes to pass. The other part of the rationale, the accountability part, is going to five vs. seven. We're keeping the Board of Finance. The seat and the term seem to deal with that same issue.

Mr. Ireland talked about the budget process and that could be multiple votes. The voting he was thinking of was more around supplemental funding and things going on during the year. The effectiveness comes from getting minds in a room, coming to a good consensus and good reasoning.

Mr. Gagnon asked, from a budget standpoint, if it was more plausible to get the three votes vs. four. Mr. Ireland talked about two years ago for the Board of Education Budget, there was one vote that took place and was voted down. The number was amended and voted on and passed. There were at least two formal votes, with an amendment.

Mr. Gagnon is a little less concerned with five vs. seven but still has concerns about candidate retention and having two more Board of Finance members vs. four. Both parties have to go out and recruit. Ms. Grasso mentioned that the Commission discussed that five members would not work as well for the minority representation.

Mr. Cannata talked about five vs. seven and that was not a deal-breaker for him. Any odd number makes it flow. As far as the campaigning and the four-year term, I've been at this a long time on Planning and Zoning. What I've found is that the campaigning is pretty much handled by the party. We're all a group and we're all along for the ride. I don't see that four years vs. six years as being a detriment. The advantage to it is that some people don't want to sign on for a six-year stint. He is in favor of the four vs. six and is sitting on the fence of the five vs. seven. He told Mr. Ireland that he appreciates what he does and the fact that he is here this evening.

Mr. Ireland asked, if it went to seven, what would be the minority number then? Chairperson Lepore responded that it would be two.

Mr. Menendez asked Mr. Ireland what he thought would be most beneficial for the group, to be at five or seven members? We try to prepare ahead of time as much as we can and if there are more bodies in a room, there will be more questions and it will take longer. Going bigger might not help with that standpoint. At the end of the day, I'm about trying to come up with a good solution, no matter who has the idea, and how long it may take. If I had it my way, I feel comfortable with six years and I was looking at it from the Commission's standpoint. I think there are conflicting ideas amongst folks as far as what our charge is. Are we here to make sure that something the Town Council has passed is being funded appropriately, and if we have the funds, is it going to the right place? Or, are we here to veto them? My mindset is, if there was a clearer picture; this is the Board of Finance, this is the goal. The years, the people and the process, I get, and I'm comfortable with. Where we run into it is people questioning something the Town Council sent us and all the pieces are right, but if I personally don't think it's worthwhile, do I say no?

Mr. Menendez said that he would think the view of the Board of Finance would be to say yes. If the Town Council wanted something and the money was there and allocated for that, then you would do it. Mr. Ireland also stated that there's also a personal perspective to it.

Mr. Ireland talked about the one percent. The Board of Finance does their work and then the Town Council will do what they want with it anyway. There seems to be a different set of circumstances for the Board of Finance vs. other committees.

Mr. Ireland mentioned Planning and Zoning to Mr. Cannata and mentioned a big project they've been looking at recently. I think it's going to have some big ramifications in Town and quite frankly, your decisions have way more impact to the budget than mine do. I'm afraid that by doing this Board of Finance thing we're taking away some of the real meat to what we do. Is this only pertaining to the budget process in March/April? Chairperson Lepore answered yes. Mr. Ireland asked, what if something of size comes along mid-year, is there no need to override or oversee that? If you're asking folks who want to run and try to make a difference in Town and have an impact, if there's no other committees that can be overridden by the Town Council other than the Board of Finance, I'm having a tough time seeing how that would work.

Mr. Gagnon asked Mr. Ireland what the current budget is and was told it is \$54.3 million. Mr. Gagnon responded that one percent of \$54 million is \$540,000. If you knew that the Town Council had a one percent lookback, wouldn't you talk to the Council ahead of time? I think a lot of the reasoning behind the one percent is that the Council and the Board of Finance don't talk enough. I'm not stuck on one percent. The emphasis has to be on effectiveness and the Town Council and the Board of Finance need to start early in the process and talk about it ahead of time. Mr. Ireland said that he sees the Board of Finance as checks and balances for the Town. He asked the Commission if the Town Council can take away any of the proposed Charter revisions presented to them. Mr. Cannata answered, yes.

Mr. Cannata said at the end of the day, the bottom line is that this is trying to force interaction between the Board of Finance and the Town Council, rather than just passing it on. Mr. Ireland stated that if there were some sort of collaboration or workshop on the budget between the Town Council, the Board of Education and the Board of Finance, he would most certainly be for that. If you put all of those groups together, we can all ask questions and work together.

Ms. Grasso mentioned to Mr. Ireland that Attorney Olson had mentioned in a previous meeting that some towns don't have a Board of Finance and some other towns have the Town Council being the last auditor on what the information is. I think your point is good, but historically I don't know that the model we've had feels successful, because it feels of top-heavy for the Board of Finance. You are running a very good group, but that is not always the case. Mr. Ireland said that he does see the Commission's points and wanted to come tonight to express his questions and concerns.

Ms. Roberto thanked Mr. Ireland for his hard work and told him she liked what he said, which is to really define the charge for the Board of Finance. The Commission has struggled with whether we should retain a Board of Finance for the Town. We concluded, that the Town would not be ready, yet, to not have a Board of Finance because of what you said, the checks and balances. I would posture that the residents of this Town do not know what the Board of Finance does, they don't come out and vote very much in terms of referenda, because they

don't understand the linkage between the Board of Finance and the Town Council. If they're going to hold anyone accountable for programs that are not being implemented or services that they feel are not implemented, they're going to go to the Town Council. They're not going to go to the Board of Finance. Our concern was, if we're going to retain the Board of Finance, to make the Board of Finance and the Town Council responsible together to the residents of the Town, so that the residents know what's going on. When a project has to go forward, there needs to be a discussion.

Mr. Ireland said that if the checks and balances piece of it is meant to be there so that the Board of Finance knows what's happening on the revenue side, where the money is coming in from and how we're going to pay for things - that's where I'm seeing where the checks and balances is coming in.

Mr. Menendez stated to Mr. Ireland that he thinks the Board of Finance and the Town Council have a good relationship. Recently, the budgets haven't been that contentious and they've been flowing pretty well, but that's not always the case. We have a Chair such as you, who is open to discussion, hears both sides, is open to criticism, and is ready to give his views. Mr. Ireland mentioned that another part as to why it hasn't been so contentious is that the Town has a grand list that seems to be going in a good direction.

Mr. Ireland said in closing that the Board of Finance brings value, helps to take a look at things and make sure we have the right legalities and pieces in place to make sure things go forward. He thanked the Commission for their time.

Chairperson Lepore called a short recess from 8:17 p.m. to 8:24 p.m.

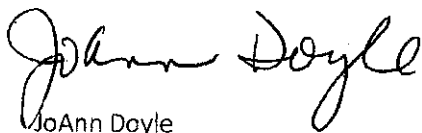
Chairperson Lepore called the Public Hearing back to order at 8:24 p.m. and read an email she received from Mr. Joseph Morin (Attachment 2).

Chairperson Lepore stated that she is not inclined, at this point, to make such a change to the Charter. If somebody did want to move that we consider that, we can vote. We had spoken a lot about the issue of having any applicants for Town Manager; it's not easy to find candidates full-stop. Would it be nice if they had a bachelor's degree in government or public administration? Sure, but I don't think that you need either one of those to be an effective Town Manager. Even if you do have one of those degrees, it does not mean that you are going to be a good Town Manager. Chairperson Lepore appreciates Mr. Morin's comment, but the Commission agrees not to go forward with his suggestion.

C. ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Lepore adjourned the Public Hearing at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



JoAnn Doyle
Recording Secretary

CRC Highlights

- Elected members of council (including mayor) will serve 4-year terms instead of 2-year terms. The terms will be continuous rather than staggered. (Section 2.02(c))
 - Separate ballot question
- CRC more clearly defined the process of filling a vacancy on the Council. Both the mayor and members of the council will continue to serve without compensation
- In recognition of the rigorous professional requirements (e.g. statutorily mandated training) of their offices, the elected Tax Collector and the Town Clerk will become appointed positions effective Jan. 1, 2023. The same individuals elected to those roles in the November 2021 municipal election will be appointed for the positions as of January 1, 2023.
 - 2 Separate ballot questions
- The lack of a residency requirement for the town manager remains. The CRC considered the struggles surrounding towns had in securing a town manager with a residency requirement and wanted to provide the Council the opportunity to choose from a larger pool of qualified candidates.
- The mayor and council will continue to serve without compensation
- The Board of Finance will now be composed of 5 members rather than 6 members with the same number of alternates.
 - separate ballot question
- The Board of Finance members will serve 4-year terms instead of 6 year terms, however, the terms will remain staggered.
 - separate ballot question
- There is a change on amendment to the budget before adoption. The new language is as follows: "Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this section, if the Board of Finance modifies the proposed annual budget presented to it by the Town Council and Board of Education, the Town Council may make a further amendment thereto and reallocate expenditures in an amount not exceeding one percent (1%) of the total proposed budget, inclusive of the Board of Education. The Town Council may make such amendments by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of those present and voting during a special meeting within three (3) business days following the public hearing on the budget. Any reallocation approved by the Town Council pursuant hereto shall be adopted by the Board of Finance without further amendment prior to the referendum within the timeframe herein."
 - Separate ballot question
- Any proposal to incur bonded debt in an amount greater than 10% of the operating budget for that fiscal year will be automatically subject to a referendum vote.



Jennifer Lepore <lepore.jenn@gmail.com>

Charter Revision

1 message

JOSEPH morin <joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net>
To: Jennifer Lepore <lepore.jenn@gmail.com>

Wed, Jun 29, 2022 at 3:40 PM

Joseph Morin
8 West Street Terrace
Cromwell CT 06416

To Jennifer Lepore and other Members of the Charter Revision Commission,

I would like to make a suggestion for your consideration. Given the recent controversies with the present Town Manager I believe in the future the charter be revised to state the qualifications of the Town Manager at a minimum have a Bachelor degree in Government or Public Administration. This would give the applicant a well rounded training in all aspects and departments within the government.

I am not stating the present manager is uneducated but he has experience in one department of government and its personal. The town needs someone who has multi-layered training and can be more likely to access different situations that come with this higher education.

I hope that you can add this to the revision of the charter because going forward it can only help

Respectfully

Joseph R. Morin