

**Charter Revision Commission
Public Hearing
February 2, 2012
Municipal Center – Council Chamber**

Minutes

Present: Daphne Adams, Robert Berube, William Brayne, Robert Cornish, John Gasparini, Robert Michalic, Jo Rosinski

Absent: None

Staff Present: Robert Lee, Town Manager, Dan Grasso, Intern,

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairman Cornish.

2. Public Comment

Town Council Member Rick Drezek, 1 Mel Road wished all of the members good luck as they go through the Charter Revision process. He indicated that he was the Chairman of the Charter Study Committee. Mr. Drezek stated that he felt the most important item the Charter Study Committee recommended was combining the finance boards of the Town and the Board of Education (BOE). He also stated that the Study Committee provided numerous scenarios to change the budget process and wished them luck in choosing the best option.

Robert A. Michalik, Jr., 2 Maiden Lane commended the members for taking time to serve the Town. He felt that the third vote on the budget should be modified, either delete it or allow the Council to make modifications after the vote. He cautioned against dragging out the process in a way that hamstrings the ability of the Council to do its job or, hampers the ability of the Town to get tax bills out in a timely manner. He didn't like the proposal to require a reduction if the budget fails. He could see a scenario where a Council may drastically reduce services, but the public may want the ability to raise the budget to get those services replaced. One of the ideas from the Charter Study Committee he would like to the Commission explore is having a petition of a certain number of voters to initiate a budget vote. He felt that if you get a certain number who petition, then you know there is a critical mass that support a vote so, that we are not wasting money on votes with low turnout.

Val Dumais, 43 Reliance Road doesn't want to see the vote extended significantly unless the Town has the ability to get tax bills out on time. He stated that when we changed to the three vote process that was the one thing that we were concerned about. He was worried that if you go longer people may have to get more than one tax bill per year. With only six to nine percent voting we are spending a lot to accomplish little.

The towns with minimum voter participation don't have any problems getting voters to come to the polls. Two years ago in Avon 45% of the voting public showed up while only 9% turned out in Plainville. The budget was voted down because a pro-education group wanted the budget increased. This happened in the first two years of the all day vote in Plainville as well. The argument was that people will come out to vote if we change the system, but this has not happened. He doesn't know why it never breaks 10%. Avon and Farmington have fewer than 3 votes. The councils in both the towns are more responsive because forty-five percent turnout to vote. In Plainville Council members may not be as responsive with only a sub-minority of the voters showing up.

Do not combine finance departments. As former Treasurer he did not agree because BOE is more complex than the Town. Could one treasurer do it? Yes probably. But there is no control over what is spent on the BOE side. It shouldn't be in Charter. If Town and BOE want to do it fine.

Tom Warnat, 11 Eastwood Drive, He served on two commissions. Minimum voting percentage is a good way to go. Towns around us residents don't get to vote such as New Britain and Bristol, because the town council sets budget with no vote. It may sound abusive, but you can get rid of council if they do a bad job. Take a look at the Glastonbury proposal. The only thing we were in total agreement on is that this Commission should look at all the options provided by the Charter Study Committee, as well as any other items they see fit. He didn't feel much needed to be changed because it has worked for 60 years.

The BOE is much more complicated than the Town. Mansfield has a combined finance department. He felt that Mansfield was altogether different than Plainville. If you do decide to do this don't put it in the Charter because Mansfield doesn't have it in budget. Let this go for a year to see if they can work together without it in the Charter. If people cannot work together than we should get rid of them. If 90% of the people don't vote then they are trusting the Council to do a good job. Wait for Blum Shapiro report before you consider putting it in the Charter.

Bob Bonola, 46 Rockwell Avenue, Take the time to go through this because there are many changes that need to be made. For example on page 16 Section 6 indicates the use of voting machines which we don't use any more. There are a lot of other things that need updating. It didn't seem right to him that three "no's" equals a "yes" with the budget vote. His idea was if the budget fails three times then it should go back to last year's budget. He saw many other items that need to be changed. Another example he provided was p21 sec 7, which refers to State statutes, which regarding what to do when we change the Charter. He stated that he may be wrong but we are under Town rule and we should check with the Town Attorney to see if this applies.

Foster White 5 Overlook Drive seconded and supported the concerns over lack of voter turnout. He would like to see reasonable threshold. Lots of people in room would be willing to help you decide what that is. He would also like to see consideration to a process for proposals out for bid in the Charter.

John Kisluk, Forestville Ave, asked the commission to change times of meeting and the meeting room. He wanted to see the all day vote stay. He wanted to see 3rd vote changed but did not offer a better proposal. He also claimed that a majority of people are not happy with process. He did not want to see combined finance departments because they are very different and it won't save money. Finally, he would like the Commission to consider a recall provision.

Arthur Screen, 63 Roberts Street Ext. did not like the threshold suggestion. He felt that if he votes no on a budget, but the threshold is not reached, then his vote does not count. He stated that the Health Department language needs to change, because we are now in Health District. He would like to see the Town Attorney be open to someone from outside of Plainville because otherwise it limits the pool of attorneys. The attorney should serve at discretion of Council. He did not want to see budget votes go indefinitely. There needs to be a closure date so everyone knows what the end date is in the process. If it fails it should be limited to last year's budget plus a cost of living adjustment. This way all people know that if they don't pass the budget, all parties will know what the final budget will be. Voter apathy has reasons but we don't know what it is. He said people have just the same right not to vote as they do to vote.

Tom Warnat 11 Eastwood Drive stated that right now the Council can put advisory questions on the budget on the ballot. If the BOE and Town are voted separately they would both need to pass to have a budget. There have been times when the residents have come out for increased education funding. He didn't agree that the Council should be limited to only reducing the next budget if it fails. Right now only six towns in state that allow recall. He spoke with Secretary of State's Office and they told him that State legislation is required to pass referendum.

Tony Baruffi, 18 Maiden Lane- there isn't a threshold for any other voting process. Maybe with a Council working together it will encourage more voter participation. He would like to see something in the Charter that protects the rights of the taxpayers.

Rob Michalic Jr. 2 Maiden Lane, was somewhat ambivalent about a threshold but it is worthy of exploration. He wanted the Commission to examine whether having additional votes is worth the cost with such a small percentage of voter turnout. He was very concerned with a process that reverts to a previous year's budget. The budget has failed 6 out of 9 years imagine if we had to revert to previous budget how outdated the budget would be. Also, we all know costs go up all the time. He was concerned that reverting to previous budget could be devastating to the services in Town.

Art Screen, this document should out live the people who are in various positions today. Ask does this work as a system with and without the people. If people know that a service is going to be cancelled then they may be more likely to vote.

Mr. Berube pointed out that if people didn't get a chance to speak, put your ideas to any member of the Charter Revision Commission. Put your requests in writing and they will bring it up at meetings.

Mr. Gasparini asked whether Mr. Lee had received any correspondence from the public who were unable to make it to the meeting. Mr. Lee responded "no."

Mr. Cornish thanked everyone who participated. He also explained that we meet in two weeks at that point we will review Chapters 1 and 2, and Chapter 7, Section 6 which deals with the budget. It is his hope that the budget will be an item at each meeting. At the next meeting he would like to review the current budget, how it stands, the current process, all the things that are good and bad about it. At subsequent meetings would like to review other town budget processes so if anyone has a specific town they want to review let him know. Section 2 deals with Town election process will seek input from Democrat and Republican Town Chairmen for any recommendations.

3. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Mr. Michalic

Second by: Mr. Gasparini

All those in favor 7, all those opposed 0, Motion passed unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Submitted by:

Dan Grasso, Intern

RECEIVED

FEB 08 2012

CAIOA Skutumpah
TOWN CLERK