CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
NOVEMBER 19, 2024
ZOOM AND COMMUNITY ROOM

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting by telephone and/or Zoom, or a recording in the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at norwalkct.gov/meetings.

Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section.

All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link
above.

Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the “raise your hand indicator” and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section.

All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email the City Clerk's office at cityclerk@norwalkct.gov with the subject line “Public Comment” to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Tyler Fairbairn, Chair; Douglas Hempstead, Vice Chair; Jo Bennett; Ed Camacho; James Clark; Carl Dickens; John Levin; Tanya Small-Rhodes

STAFF: Irene Dixon, City Clerk; Esther Murillo, Assistant City Clerk; Thomas Livingston, Chief of Staff; Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer

OTHER: Steve Mednick, Commission Counsel

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Fairbairn called the Roll as indicated above.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: November 13, 2024

The following correction was made to the minutes:

Mr. Clark asked if public comments could be made verbatim instead of summarized should read that Mr. Clark asked if the public hearing comments could contain more details as not to lose details relative to the comments.

** **MR. CLARK MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS AMENDED**
** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Fairbairn explained that the purpose of this evening's meeting was to hear from elected officials. He provided a brief recap of the meetings to date.

There were no members of the public who wished to comment this evening.

V. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion with elected officials

Mayor Harry Rilling expressed his thanks to the members of the Charter Commission. He said it is now in a readable order. He spoke in support of changing the terms of the Mayor and Common Council from two years to four years. He said if this change was made it would not be effective until the 2027 term. He also spoke in support of changing the term of the Town Clerk from two years to four years. He described the reasons for these changes and noted that the Board of Education is already on a four year cycle.

Ayor Rilling also supported keeping the existing structure of the Board of Estimate and Taxation. He noted that members are selected for their financial knowledge. He also suggested addressing technical clean up.

Mr. Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer offered suggestions to the Charter. He proposed moving from a five year capital budget to a 10 year capital budget. He suggested removing the frequency of when the taxpayer pays the bills from the Charter.

Mr. Schmitt suggested aligning the Mayor's involvement in the capital budget to mirror the operating budget. He also suggested clarifying the roll of Planning and Zoning in the capital planning process.

Ms. Darlene Young, Common Council President offered suggestions on behalf of the members of the Common Council. A suggestion was to clean the existing document and tweak the current government to move the City forward. She addressed part two in the Charter related to taxing districts. Ms. Young suggested revisiting the Sheriff and Constable positions. She also recommended increasing the term of the Mayor and Common Council to four years and moving an increase to the compensation for the Common Council to a Referendum. Ms. Young will forward her written comments to Mr. Mednick.

Ms. Barbara Smyth, Common Council member agreed with Ms. Young's comments and offered personal comments. She requested that the focus be kept to what is best for the City. She explained that when elected officials make decisions on the budget, their focus is on getting elected. They need to focus on the health of the City and not allow politics to cloud their decisions.

Ms. Smyth said it is frustrating for Common Council members when they hear what their constituents need and then to have the Board of Estimate and Taxation deny the request. Better and earlier communication between the Common Council and the Board of Estimate and Taxation is needed. She said the language in section 10-16 regarding the capital budget has caused confusion and misinterpretation by the Common Council. The process needs to be clarified in the language. Ms. Smyth said she supported the four year terms.

Mr. Gregory Burnett, at large member of the Common Council offered comments and said he supported the comments made by the other speakers. He suggested looking at how the Finance and Claims Committee is involved in the capital budgeting process. He said the Committee should have a greater role in that process, similar to their role in the operating budgeting process.

Mr. Burnett said another priority was extending the terms of the Mayor and Common Council from two years to four years. He also said he strongly supported the current role of the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

Mr. Levin asked about the challenges mentioned in hiring and retaining staff due to a two year term. Mr. Livingston, Chief of Staff explained that it is difficult to answer that question, because they do not know people's motivation. He noted they have open senior positions and common sense will tell you that it is easier to recruit for a longer period of time. The positions are coterminous with the Mayor's term. The two year term leaves things up in the air if things change.

Mr. Levin asked if in terms of long term planning the two year term makes strategic planning challenging. He asked if that happens due to having a two year term. Mr. Livingston noted that in terms of long and short term planning, all things take longer to accomplish than in the private sector. Mr. Levin said he was challenged to understand how the two year term makes it difficult. Mr. Livingston said it is better to plan for long term. Mr. Levin said he was looking for an answer to support the comment that strategic planning is difficult with a two year term. Mr. Livingston said a four year term makes more sense.

Mr. Dickens provided an historical prospective and said this question was vetted during the last charter revision. He noted that he felt a lengthened term would be helpful. He said the Charter Revision Commission did a great job keeping politics out of the process. He described why the increased term of office was removed from the Charter.

Mr. Mednick said he will put together a panel with people from other cities with different terms of office.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she supported Ms. Young's comments. She spoke about the current allocation of the budgetary responsibilities and said she felt elected officials should make the final appropriation for budgets rather than the unelected Board of Estimate and Taxation making the decision. She said the decision should be made by a body the residents have control over. Mr. Dickens Asked if there is equal representation across the City on the Board of Estimate and Taxation. She said that it is up to the discretion of the Mayor and that he has historically tried to get minority representation from each district.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said it is good governance to have elected officials make the decision on the budget. She said the major issue is the Board of Estimate And Taxation does not have the full context of why something is important.

Mr. Camacho gave an example where what is important for one district can result in a significant tax increase in another district. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said that was a political decision. She reiterated that the budgeting decisions should be made by an elected body.
Mr. Hempstead asked for clarification on the budgeting process. Mr. Schmitt explained it is a five year capital plan. The rating agencies look at the plans. He said it would be good to have a 10 year plan. He noted the five year plan does not align with their capacity and the Common Council has more authority over the capital budget than the operating budget.

Mr. Burnett explained that the Common Council does not have the authority to increase the amount set by the Board of Estimate and Taxation, but it can move dollars around. He said they are looking for more clearer, more specific language to determine what the process would be used by the Common Council to move dollars from one line to another.

Mr. Mednick asked Mr. Schmitt to look at how alignment would look and how it is established in the Charter. Mr. Hempstead said he would like input from the Common Council. Mr. Mednick said it was important to be sure the Common Council is consulted at all times.

Mr. Levin asked to revisit the four year term and asked what problem would be addressed by extending the term from two to four years. Mr. Burnetts said it would not address a problem, but would allow for a more efficient way of governing the City. He described his own experience on the Board of Education and said a four year term allows you to embrace the work that needs to be done and establishes long term strategies. He noted that the moment you are elected to the Common Council, you are thinking about getting re-elected. A four year term allows a more efficient way of governing the Common Council role.

Mr. Fairbairn said that at the December meeting they will determine now they will tackle the Charter. Mr. Mednick said the discussions may be based on the availability of speakers.

Mr. Hempstead noted that the Redevelopment Agency does not appear in the Charter.

Mr. Mednick suggested looking at the grid and developing a list of questions. Mr. Levin said the Commission website should be modified to notify residents that their input is invited. He also said he shared a one page description of what a charter revision is that was developed from the last Charter Revision. Mr. Fairbairn said he will look at the suggestions and check with Ms. Murillo. Mr. Levin pointed out that there are nine members of the Charter Revision Commission instead of seven. Mr. Fairbairn said he will update that.

VII. **ADJOURNMENT**

****	MR. DICKENS MOVED TO ADJOURN**
****	MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further discussion, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services