

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 3, 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

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.

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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; John Levin; Richard McQuaid, Town Clerk;
Tanya Small-Rhodes

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STAFF: Esther Murillo, Assistant City Clerk; Thomas Livingston, Chief of Staff
OTHER: Steve Mednick, Commission Counsel

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Fairbairn called the Roll as indicated above.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: November 19, 2024

The following corrections were made to the minutes:

Correct the spelling of Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner's name throughout
Correct the spelling of Mayor on page 3
Correct the spelling of now to how

Mr. Levin expressed the desire for more detailed minutes. He was told that in a perfect world they would have a court reporter taking the minutes; however, that would result in a significant expense. Mr. Levin was told the recordings of the meetings are available and his comments were duly noted. Mr. Levin said that in the interest of transparency he needs more details in order to make the minutes more useful.

Mr. Clark said he was assuaged because Mr. Mednick is taking copious notes and therefore feels the Commission is in good hands. Mr. Mednick explained his notes are not published. He has notes in the grid. He suggested asking the company to provide more robust minutes. Mr. Fairbairn said the entire meeting is recorded.

Mr. Hempstead said that in his experience, the minutes are a sense of the meeting and are not a record of the meeting.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS REVISED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Ms. Diane Lauricella thanked the Commission for providing a public participation portion of the meeting. She suggested holding an educational session for the public before the Charter Revision goes to a vote. She said there needs to be a discussion expanding the number of Common Council members as well as expanding their term to a four year term. Ms. Lauricella suggested talking to former Common Council members regarding her two suggestions regarding the Common Council.

Ms. Lauricella suggested expanding the pay for Common Council members with standards attached to that pay, such as a requirement to have a certain number of constituent gatherings.

Ms. Lauricella said there is a way to look at term limits under a special act. She suggested limiting terms to three terms in a row.

Ms. Lauricella said the role of the Redevelopment Agency should have a much less role and the capital and operating budgets should have a bigger role.

Ms. Elsa Peterson Obuchowski, Chair First District Water said a Common Council member said to her something about the City Charter does not have the authority to include anything on the taxing districts. She asked that the Charter acknowledge the taxing districts.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Levin commented that if the Commission is seeking to invite commentary from the public, there is a need for a portal on the website. He said he also discussed adding a section with frequently asked questions but does not see it on the website. Mr. Fairbairn said he is fairly certain they are there but will double check.

Mr. Hempstead said he received notice that Ms. Dunn, Common Council Minority Leader, submitted her comments earlier. Mr. Fairbairn said he will make sure Ms. Dunn's comments are added to the minutes.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Meeting Calendar 2025

Starting on January 7, 2025, the Charter Revision Commission will meet every other Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. The draft report is due on May 30, 2025.

**** MR. CAMACHO MOVED TO ADOPT THE 2025 MEETING CALENDAR AS PRESENTED**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

B. Items to address

Mr. Mednick addressed articles 13 & 14 and said the former Commission could not address these sections. He will send those sections to Mr. Livingston, Chief of Staff and ask him to distribute them to the appropriate departments for feedback. He will report back to the Commission once feedback is received.

Mr. Fairbairn explained that during the last Charter Revision, they started at the top and worried their way down. Mr. McQuaid noted that method seemed to work once they got the grid in place.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the process to discuss issues. Mr. Mednick explained he will give the Commissioners background data. The question is whether or not it is worth having a panel discussion. He said he can put together good panels with people with expertise in a specific topic.

Mr. Mednick was asked about discussing the possibility of adding the position of City Manager. Mr. Mednick said he did not believe anyone brought that up, but said there are different models and feels that should be discussed on a separate night.

Mr. Mednick addressed the section on the Sheriff and Constable and said that is a political discussion and will have to be looked at as a separate issue.

As far as term limits are concerned, the City of Norwalk is not in a special act regiment. The job of the Charter Revision Commission is to revise and pass the Charter and not enact special acts. The four year term would be an issue. In addition, they need to discuss the issue of Common Council vacancies.

Mr. Mednick instructed the Commissioners to think about how to break down the sections.

Mr. Mednick explained that when they finish a meeting with a panel, they can determine if they want to continue the conversation or wait to the next meeting to discuss the topic. He said he will discuss how to lay out the exploration of the topics. He noted the last charter revision was a massive undertaking.

Mr. Fairbairn asked if meeting every two weeks provides enough time to determine how they are going to break down the next topic. Mr. Mednick said the panels will take up a big part of the meeting and suggested the Commission may want to reserve time at the next meeting to review their meeting with the panel. He said he will start to check out potential speakers for the January 7th meeting.

Mr. Camacho pointed out two issues that were raised by the public this evening. The first is if the taxing districts should be in the Charter and if the City is authorized to deal with term limits. Mr. Fairbairn said he would be in favor of not touching term limits. Mr. Mednick said they can dispense on the term limit topic. He said he believes there are references in the Charter because of interactions with the taxing districts.

Mr. Mednick said he could explore removing part two from the Charter because the Charter Commission cannot touch that; however, he said he wants to do more due diligence before removing it. Mr. Levin said the taxing districts were retained because at the time of the 1913 merger it was a pain to dissolve them. Mr. Mednick noted the taxing districts are a unique structure. Mr. Levin said if they got the right solution, the taxing districts would be dissolved. Mr. Mednick asked if it would be reasonable to task the next Charter Revision to review the feasibility of taxing districts. Mr. Mednick explained that removing taxing districts is not in the purview of the Charter Revision Commission.

Mr. Hempstead said he did not want to see the Charter Revision Commission spend time on undoing the taxing districts. Mr. McQuaid agreed. Mr. Levin said he was not proposing eliminating taxing districts, but pointed out that they are unnecessary and better governments exist without them.

Term limits are off limits. Mr. Mednick said he will look at the interconnects with the taxing districts in the Charter. He added that he will reach out to the taxing districts as well.

A discussion took place around the inclusion of the Redevelopment Agency in the Charter. Mr. Camacho said he did not recall the Redevelopment Agency going before the Board of Estimate and Taxation regarding their budget.

Mr. Mednick said the provision of the budget for Common Council compensation has to go to a Referendum. He explained that in other communities they establish a baseline compensation and increase it based on the cost of living adjustment. This complies with the statute. He noted that they could repeal the statute that requires a referendum for Common Council compensator and then it would be included in the budget.

Mr. Levin suggested a rate of \$100 per month with the additional cost of living adjustment. It was noted that is not much different from the current \$60 per month. Mr. Mednick said a lot of communities are in the \$4,000 - \$5,000 range per year. He said there are a lot of options.

VII. DISCUSSION

There was no further discussion.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

There was no further business,
and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services