COMMON COUNCIL **JUNE 4, 2025**
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT

COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS
AND VIA TELECONFERENCE

Council President Smyth called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and led the Assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as follows:

Council at Large:	Mr. Gregory Burnett	Mr. Joshua Goldstein
	Mr. Johan Lopez	Ms. Nora Niedzielski-Eichner
	Ms. Barbara Smyth	
District A:	Mr. Jalin Sead	*Ms. Ayers*
District B:	*Mr. Dajuan Wiggins*	*Ms. Darlene Young*
District C:	Ms. Nicole Eaddy	Ms. Anne Wennerstrand
District D:	Ms. Heather Dunn	*Mr. Douglas W. Sutton*
District E:	Mr. James Frayer	*Ms. Lisa Shanahan*

At Roll Call there were 10 (10) Common Councilmembers present and five (5) absent. A quorum was present. City Clerk Irene Dixon was also present.

Ms. Smyth stated that they would not have Public Comment at this meeting, but would have Public Comment at subsequent meeting.

III. PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Mr. Fairbairn came forward and thanked the Council for convening the meeting. Mr. Hempstead, Mr. Clark, Mr. Dickens, Mr. Levin and Ms. Bennet along with Atty. Stephen Mednick were present in the Chambers. Ms. Rhodes-Small and Atty. Camacho joined the meeting via Zoom. He noted that while he would be referring collectively to the Commission, not everyone agreed on all of the points.

Article 1 – no proposed changes.
Article II – there were a few edits and revisions regarding the capital budget and the capital Improvement Plan.
Article III – There were some significant recommendation including recommending the number of Council Members from 15 to 20 by adding one Council Member to each of the Districts and the five At Large seats would remain the same. He noted that MPR was not approved but pointed out that the increase in the number of seats would increase the opportunity for the non-majority parties to obtain a seat. At this time, MPR was not recommended but the Commission felt this would be a first step towards that goal.

In Article III 4(a)1 – the Commission recommended a four year term for the Mayor along with the Town Clerk following the 2029 election. The second recommendation was starting a four year term for Common Council Members following the 2031 election. There was also a reinforcement of Council Districts by ordinance.

Article IV – There was clarification on the process for the appeals provisions pertaining to the assessment and damages regarding the taking of land in Section 44C3(b) and (c). These were formerly included in the Special Acts section at the end of the Charter.

Section 4.7(c) – there were minor modifications to the authority of the Council to establish compensation for all officers and employees of the City by recognizing the requirements of collective bargaining agreements. There is also a recommendation to eliminate language requiring a referendum for Council salary increases because the Connecticut
General Statutes already provides that.

In Section 4.10 – the recommendation is that the percentage or electors required to sign a referendum be reduced from 8% to 4% and reducing the number of electors for filing a referendum from 5 to 4.

Article V – No recommended changes.

Article VI – The recommendation is for the repealing the office of the Sheriff, but retaining the Constables in Section 6.4

In Section 7 – there were a number of recommendations. In Section 7.1(b)2, there was a recommendation to modify the requirements of Boards and Commissions to require compliance with provisions in lieu of adopting the provisions in an ordinance that establishes the Board or Commission.

In Section 7.1(b)2(c) – the Commission repealed the requirement to comply with minority party representation as it was already addressed in 7.1(b)7.

In Section 7.1(b)2(d) – the Commission clarified the requirement for Boards and Commissions to establish a standard for frequency of meetings unless otherwise addressed by ordinance.

In Section 7.1(b)4 – the Commission eliminated language that a Board or Commission must not cancel meetings for two consecutive months since certain entities may not hold monthly meetings.

In Section 7.1(e)2 – the recommendation is that the removal standard that allows a Board or Commission to establish a standard for attendance by its members for purposes of removal from office.

In Section 7.2(a)2 – the recommendation is that the term of office for the Board of Estimate and Taxation commence on the first day of February on a staggered basis for a term of four years.

In Section 7.2(a)3 – the recommendation is for a provision that requires the Board of Estimate and Taxation to include at least one member from each of the five Council Districts. The current language restricts membership to not more than two members from any one Council District belonging to the same party.

In Section 7.2(b)1(a) and 7.2(c)1(a) – the recommendation is that the members of the Police and Fire Commission serve co-terminously with the Mayor subject to approval by the Common Council.

Article VIII – The recommendation is to eliminate the word "unclassified" in relation to the Employees in Section 8.2(a)2 since it is not a term that is used by the City of Norwalk.

In Section 8.2.8(a)4 – the recommendation that the appointment of the Library Director by the Mayor subject to approval by the Council be made following consultation with the Public Library Board.

In Section 8.3(b) – the recommendation is to repeal the role of the Board of Estimate and Taxation with regard to the structure of the Office of Corporation Counsel.

In Section 8.4(b)4 and Sections 8.4(c)2; 8.4(c)3, 8.4.(d); 8.4(e)1 and 8.4.(e)2, 8.7(b)2 and 8.7(b)3 – the recommendation is for recodification of Section 14.2, 14.3, 14.4, 14.5(n), 14.5(o), 14.6(a) and 14.6(m) regarding Special Act Authority, the recommendation is that the Council address the delineations of provisions in Section 8.7(b)2 and 8.7(b)3 for further refinement.

Atty. Mednick said that the last two chapters were intended to sunset by moving the bulk of the items into the appropriate locations. He noted that there were some departments that did not provide much input. He said that there would be large blocks of texts with underscore because of this.

Article IX – There were no recommended changes.

Article X – In Section 10(a)1 and 10(a)2, – the recommendation is to move these sections to Section 2.2(b).

In Section 10.1(c)4 – the recommendation is to add the Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer of the Norwalk Public School system as well as the Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission to the Joint Hearing Panel which currently consists of the Mayor, the City CFO, the Council President, the Chair of the Committee authorized to review the budget, the Chair Pro Tem of the Board of Education, the Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission and a BET member designated by the Mayor.

Section 10.1(d) and 10.1(e) – the recommendation is to recodify the provision which are currently Sections 10.2(a) , 10.2(b) and 10.11 in order to consolidate the estimate and pre-submission requirements for both the Operating and Capital Budget in one place.

Section 10.2(a) – the recommendation is for new introductory language in this provision.

Section 10.2(b) builds on the 2023 Commission's affirmation for public accountability and adds another public meeting of the Chief Financial Officers of the City and the Board of Education with the committees of the jurisdiction of the Council and the Board of Education to give members of the public a preview of the budget.

Section 10.3 – the recommendation is to submit the Operating Budget on the same day it is submitted to the Board of Estimate and Taxation on February 15th.

Section 10.5 – the recommendation is to add a provision that would effectuate the cap established by the Mayor in the event that the Council fails to do so on or before February 28th.

Section 10.5(c) – the recommendation is to delete the term "taxation" and replacing it with "total appropriations" which seems to align with the actual practice.

Section 10.6 – the recommendation is to replace the term "any alterations" with "proposed changes".

Section 10.10(a) – the recommendation is the elimination of the requirement to establish a limit expenditures at a Special Meeting.

Section 10.11(a) – the recommendation is to merge this provision with Section 10.1(d)2.

Section 10.11(b) and 10.11(c) – the recommendation is to establish new provisions for submission, notice of publication, and public hearing requirements for the Mayor's Capital Budget and Capital Improvement Plan.

Section 10.12 – the recommendation is for minor alterations of the CFO's report.

Section 10.13 – the recommendation is for restricting the Planning and Zoning hearings to the Capital Budget and not to include the Capital Plan along with including members of the Council among those who meet with the Planning and Zoning Commission. This would clarify that the sole function of the Planning and Zoning Commission is to assess the alignment of the Capital Budget with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Section 10.15 – the recommendation is to clarify the role of the Board of Estimate and Taxation as an advisory function in so far as the Capital Budget is concerned.

Section 10.16 – the recommendations include several changes including the reinstatement of authority and a re-establishment of a clear public hearing requirement.

Section 10.17 – the recommendation is for modification of the grounds for termination or abandonment of capital items.

Article XI – The Commission recommends the retention of a mandatory Charter Revision Commission be scheduled every 10 years.

Article XII – No proposed changes.

Article XIII and XIV – these Articles will disappear since their contents have been incorporated into other Articles.

Ms. Smyth thanked Mr. Fairbairn and the members of Commission. She then opened the floor for questions but requested the questions regarding the four year term be held until last.

Mr. Hempstead said that he was disappointed that the MPR was not included. He spoke about his thoughts. He noted that Norwalk was only one of two communities to do this. It has been a long time since there were any Council seats added but the City has grown.

Atty. Camacho said that both he and Mr. Fairbairn had voted against keeping the Charter Revision mandatory time at five years. He reminded everyone that the Council can convene a Review whenever they wish. He felt that it could be disruptive by having it too soon.

Mr. Levin then spoke and said that the current five year review. He thanked the Council for this experience. He said that there were changes that continually happen in the City and in the government all the time. Mr. Levin does not believe that the reviews were disruptive and made the City government unstable. He spoke about the public hearings, which invites the public to give their input. He spoke about how the taxing districts were a relic from 1913 but they do not add to the function of the City Government. There were a number of other unfinished items that he hoped the future Commissions would address.

Atty. Camacho said that the vote to keep the review at five years was approved with a 7 to 2 vote. He said that he felt that having a mandator review could be disruptive.

Mr. Dickens said that he would like the Council Members’ assistance in better communication to the residents. Currently, people rely on the media. He said that when there are Council or Commission seats open that they get the word out to their constituents. He thanked the Commissioners for all their work.

Mr. Hempstead spoke about positions that were appointed rather than elected. There were concerns about having four year terms and how they would have to be staggered.

Atty. Mednick said that Commissioner Clark had suggested that when there are Latin terms that the general public might not be familiar with and that definitions should be included. He asked the Council Members to note any of these types of terms and to let him know.

Atty. Camacho then spoke about the details of the staggered four year terms. He said that by breaking the elections into four years, all the elections become very important.

Mr. Clark said that in order to make the Charter more readable for the public, he would like to see a short summary before each one of the articles. Hopefully this will engage the public more.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked about the details regarding the Fire Commission and Police Commissioners to be co-terminus with the Mayor.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said that Mr. Levin had mentioned eliminating the Taxing District and she pointed out that this was a State creation. The City does not have the authority to do so and any changes would not be done through the Charter.

Atty. Camacho said that Common Council salaries was governed by State law. At this time, it can only be done by referendum. Council Member Niedzielski-Eichner asked for clarification. Atty. Camacho explained that if the Charter had set a dollar amount, they would be stuck with that amount if the State law changed in the future. Discussion followed about the details.

IV. REVIEW CHARTER REVISION PROCESS AND PROPOSED SCHEDULE

Ms. Smyth said that Council has 45 days to transit this. She reviewed the details of the proposed schedule.

A. June 12, 2025 – Common Council Workshop #1
B. June 18, 2025 – Common Council Workshop # II, if needed
C. June 24, 2025 - Public Hearing and Deliberation
D. July 8, 2025, 7:30 PM - Vote on the Charter Revision at Common Council Meeting
E. July 9, 2025 – Conferral Meeting with the Charter Revision Commission, if needed

Atty. Mednick said that the Council could accept the recommendations with no questions. If not, the Council will have to provide the Commission with their recommendations and a mediated process takes place in order to create an acceptable document. He said that the Council would have to act in mid-August and the Town Clerk would have to submit the question by September.

V. ADJOURNMENT

**** THERE WAS A MOTION TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services