I. CALL TO ORDER

Majority Leader Mr. Goldstein called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Due to inclement weather, the meeting was held entirely on Zoom.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as follows:

Council at Large:	Mr. Gregory Burnett (7:02 P.M.)	Mr. Joshua Goldstein
	Mr. Johan Lopez	Ms. Nora Niedzielski Eichner
	Ms. Barbara Smyth	
District A:	Ms. Nicol Ayers (7:04 P.M.)	Mr. Jalin Sead
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

There were eleven (11) present at Roll Call. Two were absent (Ms. Smyth and Ms. Dunn).

Ms. Dixon, Attorney Mednick, and Mr. Schmitt were also in attendance.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one present who wished to address the Council at this time.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Proposed Charter Revision

Mr. Goldstein explained that the meeting's purpose was to continue reviewing the Charter Revision Commission's draft, allowing Council Members to raise concerns and identify areas of consensus. This would assist Attorney Mednick in drafting a resolution ahead of the July 22 Council vote. He proposed reviewing the Commission's recommendations article-by-article, addressing specific items only if flagged, and requested that discussion on the four-year term be postponed until the end due to Ms. Young's planned recusal.

Attorney Mednick outlined the procedure: the draft charter, prepared by the Commission, is now under Council review. The Council doesn't approve or reject it outright but instead makes formal recommendations, additions, deletions, or changes back to the Commission. After a conferral between Council leadership and the Commission, the charter returns to the Council for a final up-or-down vote, with no further amendments allowed. He stressed the need for leadership to be fully engaged during the conferral.

Ms. Shanahan asked if the Council could decide how the charter revisions appear on the ballot. Attorney Mednick confirmed they could structure the ballot as they wish. While the Commission may suggest formats, they traditionally defer to the Council on this matter.

The discussion moved on to Article I.
Mr. Lopez proposed renaming the legislative body from "Common Council" to "City Council," citing clarity and consistency with other municipalities. Mr. Burnett supported the idea but asked about potential costs. Attorney Mednick said the financial impact would be minimal, limited to signage and letterhead, and offered to include language ensuring legal continuity.

Ms. Young raised a hypothetical concern about cost thresholds. Ms. Ayers viewed the change as a cultural update, similar to inclusive language revisions. Ms. Dixon added that most materials are digital and costs like business cards are minimal and typically post-election.

Mr. Sutton noted campaign signage costs and suggested a "doing business as" transition. Attorney Mednick proposed implementation after the 2027 election, but Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Lopez, and others preferred 2025. Mr. Schmitt agreed costs would be low but requested 24 hours for review. There were no objections, and a consensus was reached to adopt the name change effective after the 2025 election.

The discussion moved on to Article III.
Mr. Goldstein presented a recommendation to expand the Council from 15 to 20 members by adding one district representative per district. However, Ms. Shanahan, Mr. Wiggins, Mr. Lopez, Mr. Sutton, Mr. Frayer, Ms. Wennerstrand, Mr. Burnett, Ms. Young, and Ms. Ayers all opposed it.
Attorney Mednick confirmed the draft would retain the current 15 member structure.

Mr. Sead proposed increasing At-Large seats from 5 to 7, with a maximum of 5 nominees per party, to boost voter choice and minority representation. He suggested implementation in 2027. Attorney Mednick said this model is common in Connecticut. Mr. Wiggins objected, saying 17 total members would be too many.

Mr. Sutton asked whether minority parties typically cross-endorse. Attorney Mednick explained that minority party rules cap majority seats rather than guarantee minority representation. He gave examples from Waterbury and New Britain, clarifying that what matters is the party under which a candidate runs, not their registration, though the system can be manipulated.

Ms. Young left the meeting at 7:53 p.m.

Ms. Shanahan expressed skepticism toward a minor party she felt acted inconsistently.
Mr. Lopez opposed Mr. Sead's At-Large amendment, saying it aimed to engineer outcomes rather than promote democracy.

In Ms. Dunn's absence, Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner shared a proposal to eliminate At-Large seats and instead create three-member districts with a two-per-party cap. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner thanked Mr. Sead for his proposal and said she was still considering it.

Ms. Ayers questioned whether the At-Large amendment would motivate voters, noting mixed feedback. Mr. Sead said it was part of a larger reform package to improve governance, transparency, and diversity.

Mr. Goldstein noted there was no consensus and asked to keep the proposal on the discussion list. Attorney Mednick agreed.

Mr. Goldstein reopened discussion on four-year terms. Ms. Ayers advised she is still undecided. The item was added to the list for further debate.

Ms. Wennerstrand raised the idea of separating this question on the ballot, referencing public support. Mr. Goldstein and Ms. Ayers agreed. Ms. Ayers also asked about mayoral term limits. Mr. Goldstein said none were proposed; Attorney Mednick explained that Connecticut law doesn't authorize term limits.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner noted that two four-year terms may be more appealing to voters. She then proposed an amendment to tie Council pay to a percentage of the Mayor's salary, supporting fairness and inclusivity. Ms. Eaddy supported the idea, while Mr. Sead raised concerns about its perceived impact.

Mr. Frayer opposed raising Council pay, citing poor optics during budget struggles. Mr. Lopez agreed.

Ms. Ayers countered that lack of pay excludes lower-income individuals and argued compensation helps with costs like childcare.

Mr. Sead requested cost details. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner estimated about 70 cents per resident, totaling $75,000. Mr. Sead said he was more concerned about optics than cost.

Ms. Wennerstrand supported exploring compensation further but emphasized public input.
Mr. Burnett questioned whether the proposed raise would improve diversity or participation. He asked if it could be a separate ballot item. Attorney Mednick confirmed this was legal and logical and said it must go to referendum. Other towns use similar models tied to cost of living adjustments.

Ms. Ayers replied that while the change wouldn't fix equity gaps, it was a necessary first step. She also noted the mayor's salary increases over time, and Council pay would adjust gradually. Mr. Goldstein noted no consensus and added the proposal to the vote list. Attorney Mednick confirmed it would be based on a percentage of the mayor's salary. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner clarified that 3% was just a placeholder and open to discussion.

Attorney Mednick shared compensation figures from other Connecticut towns, showing Norwalk at the low end.

Mr. Burnett asked what would happen if a future mayor declined their salary. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said the formula would be based on the budgeted salary, not the amount paid. Attorney Mednick agreed the language could be clarified.

Mr. Lopez asked if pay could instead be set by ordinance. Attorney Mednick said it could, but still needed voter approval.

Mr. Sead supported charter inclusion for transparency. Mr. Sutton questioned the jump to a percentage based figure. Mr. Lopez and Mr. Sead added that residents are often unaware of how little Council members are paid.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner mentioned outdated tech and FOIA compliance needs, which could be addressed with stipends. Mr. Goldstein supported that and proposed clarifying language on Council-set compensation to reflect existing legal requirements.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner proposed allowing Council to appoint additional staff beyond the Assistant City Clerk. The intent was to offer flexibility, not require new hires. Roles could include financial or communications support.

Mr. Burnett asked how new staff would be created. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said the process would involve job descriptions, Council votes, and HR. Attorney Mednick said different towns use different approaches.

Mr. Frayer opposed hiring without clear need, asking for more details on duties and cost. He said existing staff support was currently sufficient, and the matter should be revisited only if that changed.

Mr. Sead supported giving the Council the authority to hire additional staff, emphasizing it was about having the option, not immediate hiring. Mr. Burnett opposed the idea.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner clarified that she was not criticizing current staff. Mr. Sead added that the Council already approves high-salary appointments, and this proposal would simply formalize similar authority.

Mr. Frayer disagreed, saying Council approves budgets but doesn’t directly hire or manage department heads, and hiring Council specific staff could duplicate existing services. Mr. Burnett shared that concern.

Mr. Sead reiterated that Council approves appointments like the CFO and Economic Development Director. Mr. Frayer responded that while Council approves appointments, those roles are funded through the mayor’s budget and don’t work for the Council.

Mr. Goldstein acknowledged the disagreement and directed Attorney Mednick to add the proposal to the list of items for discussion and possible vote.

Ms. Eaddy said she saw the role as a support staffer to assist with scheduling, communications, and constituent services, especially helpful for full-time working members.

The discussion moved on to Articles IV–VI.
There were no objections to previously discussed items.

The discussion moved on to Article VII.
Mr. Frayer and Ms. Shanahan raised concerns with Section VII-2(a)(3). Ms. Shanahan requested it be added to the discussion list. Mr. Goldstein and Attorney Mednick agreed, confirming it would be marked for further debate, not consensus.

Ms. Young rejoined the meeting at 9:13 p.m.

Mr. Goldstein asked if members had reviewed the amendment, and Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner clarified it was drafted for Ms. Young, who was invited to speak. Ms. Young asked if the group wanted to discuss it now; Mr. Goldstein noted there was no consensus yet and that it required further discussion.

Ms. Young supported the amendment, stating it would give the Council more influence in the budget process by allowing a representative, voting or non-voting, on the BET.

Ms. Shanahan questioned how one member could represent the full Council and expressed openness to a non-voting role. Ms. Young agreed, emphasizing that such a position could improve communication and Council insight into the budget process.
Attorney Mednick said similar arrangements exist in other municipalities and explained that only voting roles would raise minority party concerns.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner mentioned Ms. Ayers had previously questioned the time demands of a non-voting role. She supported a voting position for meaningful representation but was open to a non-voting role for consensus.
Ms. Shanahan reiterated she only supported a non-voting role. Mr. Goldstein confirmed the amendment would be added to the discussion list.

Mr. Lopez proposed that the Council receive a confidential list of board and commission applicants in advance to allow proper review. Mr. Frayer strongly supported the idea as a practical step.

Mr. Lopez clarified the list would remain confidential. Mr. Goldstein and Attorney Mednick agreed the proposal had broad support and should be included on the consensus list, with procedural details like timelines to be worked out later, possibly by ordinance.

The discussion moved on to Articles VIII & IX
Mr. Goldstein noted there were no objections or amendments to Articles VIII and IX, and they were added to the consensus list.

The discussion moved on to Article X.
Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner proposed creating separate budget caps for the Board of Education and the rest of the City to improve clarity and allow cap-compliant budgets. Ms. Shanahan confirmed BET would still need Council approval to raise caps and recommended a vote due to disagreement. Mr. Goldstein agreed and invited comments.

Mr. Frayer opposed the dual caps, calling them duplicative. Mr. Goldstein confirmed both cap-related amendments would be added to the discussion list.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner added that Section XVI would include revised budget deadlines and require a BET meeting with the full Council, an idea previously suggested by Mr. Burnett.

Mr. Schmitt flagged that the language in Section XVI.B should allow appropriations "not to exceed" the cap, not "equal to" it. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner agreed to revise the language with Attorney Mednick.

The discussion moved on to Section XVII
Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner introduced an amendment to make Council budget overrides binding, allowing them to direct how funding is allocated after a two-thirds vote. She acknowledged an alternate version (non-binding expression of intent) but preferred to move forward with the stronger option.

Mr. Schmitt questioned whether this would shift fiscal authority from the BET. Attorney Mednick said charter governments have flexibility to define roles and the change would be legally appropriate.

Mr. Lopez raised concerns about blurred responsibilities and proposed alternatives like capping amendments, requiring impact memos, and limiting which items could be altered.
Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner appreciated his suggestions and argued that with the two-thirds vote requirement, misuse was unlikely.

Mr. Schmitt noted that towns like Fairfield limit legislative authority to reducing budgets only and warned that Norwalk's strong fiscal reputation could be at risk if major changes were made. Mr. Frayer agreed and expressed concern over Council modifying line items without considering full revenue impacts. He supported the non-binding option and defended BET's role in maintaining fiscal balance.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner countered that the current system excludes resident voices. She cited the loss of a qualified Webmaster candidate due to a BET decision as an example of why override authority could be beneficial. She emphasized the importance of weighing both financial and community priorities.

Mr. Frayer acknowledged imperfections but stood by the current process. Ms. Shanahan agreed, noting the BET helps depoliticize budgeting.

Mr. Wiggins questioned resistance to giving the Council more authority. Mr. Frayer replied that existing safeguards were effective and that Council overrides could increase inefficiency and taxpayer burden. Mr. Wiggins countered that it would still be hard to overturn BET decisions.

Mr. Sead added that the public often wrongly assumes the Council has more budget control than it does and that this change would align power with public expectations.

Mr. Frayer urged Council members to engage more deeply in budget sessions.
Ms. Young agreed and said Council often gets involved too late in the process, limiting input. She supported more proactive engagement through committees and earlier access to information.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner proposed requiring departments to meet with Council committees, as they already do with the Board of Education. She concluded by stressing that elected officials should ultimately be accountable for budget decisions.

Mr. Goldstein and Attorney Mednick confirmed that the discussed items would be added to the list for further debate. Mr. Goldstein thanked members and reminded them to submit any proposed changes in writing.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

ATTEST:________________________
Irene Dixon, City Clerk