

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 29, 2025
ZOOM AND COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

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.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:04p.m.

ATTENDANCE: Tyler Fairbairn, Chairman; Richard McQuaid; Carl Dickens; Jim Clark; John Levin; Doug Hempstead, Co-Chairman; Ed Camacho; Jo Bennett(6:06pm)

STAFF: Steven Mednick; Commission Counsel

OTHERS: Barbara Smyth, Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, Jalin Sead, Josh Goldstein, Lunda Asmani, Jared Schmidt, Nicole Eady

II. ROLL CALL

Chairman Fairbairn called the Roll: Tyler Fairbairn, Chairman; Richard McQuaid; Carl Dickens; Jim Clark; John Levin; Doug Hempstead, Co-Chairman; Ed Camacho

At Roll Call there were seven (7) Committee members present constituting a quorum. Jo Bennett arrived at (6:06pm)

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Sheri McCready-Pritchett, Chair of the Norwalk Board of Education Finance Committee. She spoke about the importance of thoughtful budgeting. She went over the process and stated that flexibility is needed to allow them to respond to real time needs. They are not opposed to two (2) separate budget CAPs or submitting a line-item budget before the council's CAP setting. In order to meet that earlier budget deadline, they would have to shift their school-based budget process from March and April to December and January. She said that it would require their principals and budget teams to engage in intensive planning during one of the busiest periods of the instructional year. The current process works because it allows time for input, planning and careful use of every dollar. Compressing the timeline could lead to hurried decisions and missed opportunities. On behalf of the finance committee, she respectfully requests the city consider a timeline that gives them the space to continue engaging in a full response budget process.

Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools. She fully supports a collaborative and transparent budgeting process. The proposed timeline would create real challenges for how they carry out the school-based budgeting process in a way that reflects unique needs of scholars, schools and staff. In order to meet the early deadlines, the school-based budgeting process, which typically takes place in March and April, would need to move up to December and January. That shift would have meaningful implications. December and January are critical months for instruction, academic monitoring and student support. Compressing the budget planning cycle into this period would place added strain on staff and limit time needed for inclusive budget planning. They greatly value their partnership with the city.

Lunda Asmani, Chief Financial Officer for the Norwalk Public Schools. Mr. Asmani explained the way the Board of Education processes their budget. He stated that if they are to have the budget completed by the CAP date of March 21st, they would have to begin as early as November. The school year would have just begun and there are many uncertainties that usually come up around March. He said it would be a challenge for them if the timeline remains to present a reconciled budget, but they have no objection to presenting a reconciled budget nor do they object to having two (2) separate CAPs. The challenge on the Board of Education's side is the timing of the work specifically engaging their schools and SGC's into this process 90 days earlier

than historically. It is the challenge of having to present 90 days earlier.

Diana Carpio, Chair of the Norwalk Board of Education. She said they support transparency and working closely with the city during the budget process. They have no issues with submitting a line-item budget earlier or working within two separate budget CAPs. Changing the timeline would mean that they must have the school-based budget planning much earlier than usual. She stated that this earlier timeline takes away from teaching and planning the students. She respectfully asked the commission to consider a timeline that gives schools enough time to do the important work without taking educators away from their students.

Chairman Fairbairn closed public participation at 6:17p.m.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Fairbairn stated the purpose of this meeting is to initiate the final round of discussions about the charter revisions. The Charter Commission has made their recommendations earlier in the summer to the Common Council. Last week, the commission was provided with an additional 21 points to consider.

A. CONFERRAL MEETING WITH COMMON COUNCIL PURSUANT TO C.G.S. §7-191(C)

Council President Barbara Smyth read through the proposed amendments from the Common Council that were approved at their last meeting. She informed the commission of which items were passed on consent or was by a split vote. Item 1 was almost consent there was one (1) dissenting vote, Item 2 was almost consent there was one (1) dissenting vote, Item 3 through Item 5 were consent, Item 6 through Item 8 were split vote, Item 9 consent, Item 10 split vote, Item 11 through Item 13 consent, Item 14 through Item 16 split vote, Item 17 through Item 18 consent, Item 19 split vote, Item 20 consent and Item 21 split vote.

Chairman Fairbairn stated that the commission will ask any questions to the council one at a time. Council President Smyth and Richard McQuaid will recuse themselves from Item 4. They will leave Item 4 for last.

- **Item 1** there were no questions.
- **Item 2** there were no questions.
- **Items 3, 5 and 6** are connected. Mr. Hempstead asked for an explanation for Item 3, 5 and 6 because they appear to be contradictory. Attorney Mednick explained that in Item 3 the council was rejecting the proposal to raise the number of council members to 20. The position was to retain it at 15 and reject the 20. Item 5 the council rejected the commission's proposal for three. Item 6 is to add two (2) more council members so they would have to reject the third one

or accept the third and reject the other two. Council Member Sead explained how they came up with the additional two (2) council members. He said that they want to give the voters the ability to decide who represents them by having a seat at the table. They began a discussion about this matter. This item only addresses the At Large seats on the council.

- **Item 7** Mr. Clark stated it is an either/or situation. Mr. Hempstead asked about the amount and if it was divided equally among the members. Attorney Mednick gave a brief explanation of the item. If it is strictly compensation, state law needs a referendum. Reimbursement accounts can be budgeted and do not fall under the purview of state statute. Chairman Fairbairn stated that Attorney Mednick will draft language for whatever the Commission decides. A discussion ensued about the expense reimbursement and what constitutes an expense. They also discussed the stipend option. Mr. Hempstead suggested taking this item to the State Legislative and having it taken out or added into the charter.
- **Item 8** Mr. Levin asked if this is not available to the council already through ordinance. Council President Smyth answered it is not currently available, other than the assistant city clerk. Attorney Mednick said that the council does not have line-item authority and if they did they could create a budget for their department. The rationale for having this type of provision would be that the board of estimate has to consider a recommendation or proposal by the Common Council for staffing. It was stated that this should be done during the budget season. There was a discussion about what is already in the charter regarding hiring employees for the council. There is a section that covers that. Attorney Mednick said that this moves §5-5.D from under the mayor to the council. The new part of this is that the council may at any time also appoint by majority vote any additional employees as it finds it necessary to conduct council's business and the board of estimate and taxation shall appropriate compensation for any such employees. Council Member Niedzielski-Eichner briefly explained why the common council should have staff. Mr. Clark talked about hiring an employee and what goes into that and the need for structure before that takes place. A discussion ensued about checks and balances on hiring.
- **Item 9** Mr. Camacho asked when is it anticipated that this disclosure would happen and what is different from what happens now. So, when the person is nominated when is the disclosure required? Council Member Goldstein stated proposing this would give them ample time to review credentials. Currently, the information is received in the council agenda which is typically given on a Friday for the Tuesday's meeting. A suggestion was made to impose a minimum time allotment of when to receive applicants' information, possibly 14 days prior. This would be for those applicants that have been considered for an appointment. Attorney Mednick recommended a quarterly disclosure requirement or 30 days before appointment requirement so every quarter there will be a disclosure of

what names are out there. Another suggestion was to propose the names at one council meeting and vote on them at the next council meeting. An acknowledgment letter to the applicants that have applied for a board that has no openings would prevent applicants from feeling left out or ignored. They discussed it being all applicants and how that would look.

- **Item 10:** there were no questions.
- **Items 11, 12, 13:** were on consent. Attorney Mednick explained that those provisions are by his recommendation to move from the back of the document to the front of the document. A couple of the provisions were too much, and he would like to continue working with the Chief of Staff and the Corporation Counsel's Office to pair it down one more time.
- **Item 14, 15, 16:** most of the larger cities do not have separate CAPs. Council Member Niedzielski-Eichner explained the process of the CAP. The city and the Board of Education provide a budget in January. The city then provides an update once the CAP is done, which is not a requirement, and that is what goes before the Board of Estimate. They do not see a CAP compliant budget from the Board of Education until April or May and that creates confusion. They would like to have the conversations that happen in March, April, May to happen in relation to a CAP compliant budget so they could have realistic conversations about what the CAP means for both the BOE and the city. Mr. Camacho asked if there was a percentage inserted into the budget for the Board of Education. The response was yes but there is no line-item budget submitted after that and/or before going public. How the CAP is to be implemented is the issue. Mr. Asmani was asked a question if there was a timeline created by BOE that would work. He responded that the issue is the timeline of when they engage the schools to have a budget submitted by March. He suggested that the CAP be set up at a later date they would be able to submit it. The city does not wish to push the timeline out. There are 169 municipalities and Norwalk being one of the first to submit the budget gives advantages to resources and the ability to get out their tax bills early, which in turn brings in revenue early.
- **Item 17:** there were no questions
- **Item 18:** there were no questions
- **Item 19:** there were no questions
- **Item 20:** there were no questions
- **Item 21:** Attorney Mednick explained that this is not a prohibition of BET action for any functions they have after a budget is approved. This is dealing with modifications of the final budget approved by the council. The council stated that this relates to the current charter language, and they want the BET to be required to follow the decisions of the council. The council wants the elected officials to make and have the final decision. Mr. Hempstead stated that the council does not approve the final budget they only approve the CAP. He began to explain the history. Council Member Niedzielski-Eichner stated Item 19 and

Item 21 are connected. Item 19 increases the council's override authority and that would make it stick in Item 21. Item 21 only applies if the council votes to override by 2/3 votes.

Council President Smyth and Town Clerk Richard McQuaid recused themselves as the Commission went back to discuss Item 4.

- **Item 4:** Council Member Goldstein stated this passed unanimously by the council to have four (4) year terms for the Mayor, Town Clerk and Council. Attorney Mednick explained the process thus far. The commission needs to determine where they want to go with this item. A question was asked if this would be a separate ballot question from the rest. Once the commission makes its recommendations, the council makes the final decision.

V. DISCUSSION

There was no discussion items.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Clark moved to adjourn.
Motion passed unanimously.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:41p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

NAME
TITLE