



REGULAR MEETING – CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION AGENDA

DECEMBER 17, 2024, 6:30 PM

BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING 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**
- II. **ROLL CALL**
- III. **ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**
 - A. **Regular Meeting: December 3, 2024**
- IV. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- V. **OLD BUSINESS**
- VI. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. **Panels for CRC Meetings**

B. Items to address

VII. DISCUSSION

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

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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**

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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PRELIMINARY PANELS FOR 2024-2025 CRC MEETINGS

Date	Topic
1/7	Structure of the Council • Size • Hybrid • Council Vacancies • Ordinances
	• District System • Minority Party Representation • Public Interactions • Committee Structure
1/21	CRC Discussion: Structure of the Council
2/4	Term of Office/Role of Sheriff and Constables • Four Year
	• Two Year
2/18	CRC Discussion: The Term of Office
3/4	General Fund Process • Mayoral Authority • BET Functions • Role of BOE in Initial Joint Public Hearings
	• Council Oversight and role • Budget Schedule alignment • Public Hearings and Interactions • Update and refine language
3/18	Capital Budget Process • Role of the Council • BET Approvals • Public Hearings and Interactions
	• Function of the Mayor • Update and refine language • Role of the Planning and Zoning Commission
4/1	CRC Discussion: The Budget Process

Issues Tracking Chart – 2024-25 Norwalk Charter Revision Commission		
Substantial Due Diligence	Research and Report	Relevance Discussion
Article I Incorporation, Construction and General Powers		
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article II Construction and Standards of General Application of the Charter of the City of Norwalk	• §2-5: City needs to do a better job of posting public hearing notices, including better use of the City website, timely notice and better distribution, in general as well as increased time for public speakers and more appropriate starting time for public hearings¹.	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article III Elections, Electors, Elected Officials, Terms of Office and Other Provisions Applicable to City Officials	• §3-3.C: Re-examine the utility of retaining the Sheriff and Constable positions². • §3-3.D: Four-year term of office for Mayor, Council and Town Clerk³; Opposition to 4-year term for Mayor and Council until there is state authority to establish term limits⁴. • §3-3.D: Expand term of office to four year for Council with term limits⁵. • §3-6: Special election shall be required for vacancies early in the term of office; for example when there is more than a year left in the term of office⁶. • §3-6.B(2): Generally, review the appointment process for Council vacancies⁷. Minority Party vacancies for Boards and Commissions should be chosen by the Minority Party Leader and not subjected to Mayoral appointment and approval by a majority of the Council⁸. • Advance democracy, including additional checks and balance: all the budget authority rests with the Mayor⁹. • Minority Party Representation (“MPR”) for all elected officials¹⁰ in order to encourage more diversity and allay the dangers of the two-party system¹¹.	
Legal Issues/Comment	Note 1: As there is no express grant of authority under law, term limits are not permitted in the State of Connecticut.	

Issues Tracking Chart – 2024-25 Norwalk Charter Revision Commission		
Substantial Due Diligence	Research and Report	Relevance Discussion
Article IV The Common Council	• Larger Common Council¹² (for example, 15-20¹³, 21¹⁴, 20-25¹⁵ • MPR for Common Council¹⁶ • More interaction between Council and public during meetings¹⁷ • Eliminate reference to compensation from the Charter; adopt in accordance with state law¹⁸. • Review historical composition of the Common Council¹⁹. • Clarify the role of the Majority and Minority Leaders²⁰	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article V The Mayor	• Non-political professional city management²¹.	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article VI Other Elected Officers		
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article VII Boards and Commissions	• §7-2: Retain the current structure of the Board of Estimate and Taxation²². • §7-2: Elect the Board of Estimate and Taxation²³. • §7-2.A(4)(c): Mil rate adoption process should be reviewed²⁴. • Add Information and Technology Commission²⁵ • Add: Energy and Environment Commission²⁶. Address sustainability and environment²⁷. • Gender equality must be required/achieved for all Boards and Commissions²⁸ • Increase public participation at Board and Commission meetings, including BET²⁹	
Legal Issues/Comment	Note: We need to the address the requirements and make them mandatory and not subject to inclusion in the Code of Ordinances.	
Article VIII Departments and Department Heads	• Should the Redevelopment Agency be in the Charter³⁰?	

Issues Tracking Chart – 2024-25 Norwalk Charter Revision Commission		
Substantial Due Diligence	Research and Report	Relevance Discussion
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article IX Education	MPR for Board of Education³¹	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article X Budget, Public Funds and Finance	- Review the balance of power between the Mayor and Council as well as their interactions with the Board of Estimate and the Board of Education, especially with respect to the budget process³². Elected officials, not appointive officials, should make final appropriation decisions³³. §10-1 through 10-17: Council should play a greater role in the creation of line-items based upon budget requests through Council sub-committees³⁴. §10-1.C(4): Add the Superintendent of Schools and CFO of the school system to the list of participants in the “Initial Joint Public Hearings”³⁵. §10-11: Five-year program of Capital Expenditures should be a ten-year program³⁶. §10-16: Review this provision in light of current confusing language ³⁷. - Align the Mayor’s involvement in the capital budget process to mirror the operating budget³⁸. - The General Fund and Capital Budgets should be submitted simultaneously³⁹. - Clarify the role of the Planning and Zoning Commission in the capital planning process⁴⁰. - Remove the frequency of when taxpayers pay the tax bills⁴¹. - Finance and Claims committee should have a greater role in the capital budget process⁴².	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article XI Transition and Miscellaneous Provisions	§11-4: Mandatory Charter Revision should be every ten years as opposed to the current standard of five years⁴³.	
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article XII Taxing Districts	Taxing District Boundaries need to be reviewed and a consensus must be reached⁴⁴	

Issues Tracking Chart – 2024-25 Norwalk Charter Revision Commission		
Substantial Due Diligence	Research and Report	Relevance Discussion
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article XIII Historical Provisions		
Legal Issues/Comment		
Article XIV Historical Transition Provisions	•	
Procedural Issues	• Review outstanding issues from last Charter revision⁴⁵. • Continue the review and tweaking of the Charter⁴⁶.	
Non-Charter issues	• Proportional representation⁴⁷	

¹ Testimony of Diane Cece, agreed to by Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

² Testimony of Council President Darlene Young (19 November 2024).

³ Testimony of Mayor Harry Rilling, Council President Darlene Young, incoming President Barbara Smyth and Councilmember Gregory Burnett (19 November 2024).

⁴ Written comments of Minority Leader Heather Dunn (3 December 2024).

⁵ Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

⁶ Testimony of Fred Wilms (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

⁷ Comment of Chair Tyler Fairbairn (19 November 2024).

⁸ Written comments of Minority Leader Heather Dunn (3 December 2024).

⁹ Testimony of Lisa Brinton (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

¹⁰ Testimony of Lisa Brinton, Fred Wilms and Diane Lauricella and written testimony of Diana Paladino Christopher (Public Hearing 29 October 2024)

¹¹ Testimony of Tanner Thompson (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024); See also, Written comments of Minority Leader Heather Dunn (3 December 2024).

¹² Testimony of Lisa Brinton (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

¹³ Testimony of Diane Cece (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

¹⁴ Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).

¹⁵ Testimony of Fred Wilms (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)

¹⁶ Testimony of Lisa Brinton and Fred Wilms (Public Hearing 29 October 2024); See also, Comments of Vice Chair Hempstead (13 October 2024),

Issues Tracking Chart – 2024-25 Norwalk Charter Revision Commission		
Substantial Due Diligence	Research and Report	Relevance Discussion

- 17 Testimony of Tyson Canevari (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).
- 18 Comments of Vice Chair Hempstead (13 October 2024); see also, testimony of Council President Darlene Young (November 19, 2024)
- 19 Comments of Vice Chair Hempstead (13 October 2024),
- 20 Written comments of Minority Leader Heather Dunn (3 December 2024).
- 21 Testimony of Lisa Brinton (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)
- 22 Testimony of Mayor Harry Rilling and Councilmember Gregory Burnett (19 November 2024).
- 23 Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).
- 24 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 25 Testimony of Diane Cece (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)
- 26 Testimony of Diane Cece (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)
- 27 Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).
- 28 Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).
- 29 Testimony of Diane Lauricella (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024).
- 30 Comments of Vice Chair Hempstead (13 October 2024),
- 31 Testimony of Fred Wilms (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)
- 32 Testimony of Council President Darlene Young (19 November 2024).
- 33 Testimony of Majority Leader Niedzielski-Eicher (19 November 2024)
- 34 Written comments of Minority Leader Heather Dunn (3 December 2024).
- 35 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 36 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 37 Testimony of Incoming Council President Smyth (19 November 2024).
- 38 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 39 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 40 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 41 Testimony of Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmitt (19 November 2024).
- 42 Testimony of Councilmember Gregory Burnett (19 November 2024).
- 43 Testimony of Mayor Harry Rilling (19 November 2024).
- 44 Testimony of Else Peterson Obuchowski (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)
- 45 Comments of Vice Chair Hempstead (13 October 2024),
- 46 Testimony of Council President Darlene Young (19 November 2024).
- 47 Testimony of Tanner Thompson (Public Hearing, 29 October 2024)