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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.

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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.

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 21, 2025
VIA ZOOM**

ATTENDANCE: Tyler Fairbairn, Chair; Jo Bennett; Ed Camacho; James Clark;
Carl Dickens; Douglas Hempstead; John Levin; Richard McQuaid;
Tanya Small Rhodes

OTHERS: Steve Mednick, Commission Counsel

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Fairbairn called the Roll as indicated above.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – 1 minute

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

Ms. Lisa Brinton expressed her thanks to all involved for the discussion two weeks ago about minority representation.

IV. NEW BUSINESS – 3 minutes

A. Structure of the Council

Mr. Fairbairn said the Commissioners will discuss what they heard at the panel discussion. He echoed Ms. Brinton's thanks and said it was great hearing from their peers in other communities. He reviewed the comments made during that discussion including the size of the Council and increased interaction with the Council.

V. DISCUSSION – 4 minutes

A. Proposed Revisions

Mr. Mednick suggested going down the list of issues. He said one of the charts lists the forms of government in the top 30 communities to get a sense of how government works. He added that he will have a full memo detailing the differences between compensation and a stipend. Mr. Mednick said he did not talk to the Majority Leader, but they are beginning to create a strategy a strategy at the State level over compensation. He said this is an issue that needs to be resolved.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there is compensation at some level and the individual was considered a employee of the City, would they then participate ion employee benefits. Mr. Mednick said there are some communities where legislators opted into their benefit system.

Mr. Hempstead asked if a majority party wins and a candidate was cross endorsed and that candidate won, did the candidate win from their own party or the party they were cross endorsed

from. Mr. Mednick said he can talk to the Secretary of the State. He added if they are endorsed by two parties, it would depend on the number of votes they got. Mr. Hempstead noted that Norwalk has a history of cross endorsement.

A discussion took place over cross endorsements. Mr. Mednick will call the Secretary of the State for an answer.

Mr. Dickens said in Norwalk if an individual runs for Common Council, in District, it is the top two vote getters who move on to the Common Council.

Mr. Fairbairn said he believed the State talks about Minority representation under Title 9 and believes it is whatever party the individual is registered with is the party they win under.

Mr. McQuaid noted that up until a few years ago, Minority parties were not as strong as they are now.

About 1 hour

Mr. Levin said the towns that have Minority party representation found clever ways to game the system.

Mr. Mednick said the way to determine the Minority party is by the outcome of the election. The Minority party is designated by the number of votes received.

Mr. Levin said compensation has been left hanging.

Mr. Dickens asked how a Common Council member who is paid by the City is classified by the City. Mr. Hempstead said they are considered an employee without benefits. He added that taxes are taken out of the checks.

Mr. Mednick said the Charter needs to be changed if the Commission wants to modify compensation. If the Legislature changes, they can make an increase through the budget. He said he did not believe there was a lot of interest from the Common Council asking for an increase in compensation.

Mr. Levin said he was highly optimistic that CT General Statute 7-460 would get repealed; it frees towns to go about their business. Mr. Mednick said he believed most of the Bill will remain in effect.

Mr. Levin said in his memo, he suggested taking Common Council compensation out of the Charter. Mr. Mednick said the Common Council does not have line item control. Mr.

Hempstead explained there is a mechanism for the Common Council to approve salary increases for certain positions on the Ordinance list. Mr. Mednick said the Ordinance list does not show up in the Charter. Compensation has to go somewhere. If the Statute remains they will need to go to a Referendum, if not, they will need to add to the budget.

Mr. Levin suggested taking out language that fixes compensation and add that the Common Council will not be less than \$100.00 per month. Mr. Camacho suggested that the Common Council salary should be 1/15th of the Mayor's salary. Mr. Fairbairn said his inclination was to continue the discussion on compensation once they find out what is happening at the State level. Mr. Mednick said he will try to report back to the Commission in two weeks.

Mr. Levin said the Commission should come to a consensus or come close to a consensus. Ms. Bennett asked Mr. Camacho how he came up with a salary of 1/15th of the Mayor's salary. He said it was the Mayor's salary divided by the 15 members of the Common Council. Mr. Levin said the goal of the State Statute is to not obligate the town to hold a Referendum to increase compensation. Mr. Camacho said if compensation is taken out of the Charter, then the Common Council members get zero. Mr. Hempstead said he would rather see it eliminated, because every time compensation is mentioned, the public reacts. Mr. McQuaid added that the next election is a municipal election and if salary is put on the ballot it will not fly. Mr. Camacho said if compensation is on the ballot it may not work especially since there is a significant tax increase. Mr. McQuaid agreed.

About 1 hour and 25 minutes

Following the discussion, compensation will not be addressed in the Charter Revision. Mr. Levin said he has no issue with removing compensation from the Charter Revision. Mr. Mednick said what the Commission does goes to the Common Council. Their compensation will be set by the budget according to law. He added that when the Charter Revision is sent to the Common Council in May, they should know the legislation by then. The Common Council can then send it back to the Commission. He said they need to get rid of the language that locks in the Referendum process.

Mr. Mednick said he did not think there was a battle to increase Common Council compensation, but they are doing this early enough to know what they feel. Mr. Levin said the intent is to improve the \$600 per year. He said the State law change is to remove the Referendum requirement. He said the Council President of Middletown raised their compensation without holding a Referendum. Mr. Mednick said that was illegal.

About 1 hour and 35 minutes

**** MR. DICKENS MOVED THAT MR. MEDNICK WILL RE-WRITE §4-7-C
ADDITIONAL COUNCIL AUTHORITY (COMPENSATION) TO REMOVE
THE EXISTING LANGUAGE SUBJECT TO THE BUDGET AND ACCORDING
TO LAW
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

About 1 hour and 40 minutes

Mr. Fairbairn said he would like to hear people's thoughts on how to approach Minority representation.

Mr. Camacho said in Norwalk, Unaffiliated are as numerous as Democrats. He said he was against Minority representation and feels it is anti-democratic and not reflective of how the people of Connecticut and Norwalk feel about which party they want to govern. Mr. Dickens agreed with Mr. Camacho and said that if you, as a party member, feel your party is not able to compete, then you make a change to make it more competitive.

Mr. Levin asked if everyone saw his memo where he tried to identify the problem, specifically dealing with Minority representation. He said in the last election, the Democrats won 55% of the total votes, but were awarded 100% of the At Large seats and that is undemocratic. This disenfranchises Minority candidates. He said the solution is cumulative voting, which is highly democratic, but not common. Mr. Mednick said it is not permissible at the local level and there is no expressed grant of authority. Mr. Fairbairn said he would defer to Mr. Mednick.

Mr. Hempstead said the Majority party makes the rules and Unaffiliated numbers have gotten bigger, He said he wants to be sure it happens by the spirit of the law and to not circumnavigate the law.

About 2 hours

Mr. Camacho asked if Darien, Westport and Greenwich have Minority party representation. Mr. Mednick said he will get data. Ms. Rhodes Small said a lot of people in her age group are Unaffiliated because there are a lot of things they do not like with each party. People look at what is beneficial to them and who makes the most sense for them and their families.

Mr. Hempstead said having voices rather than three minutes at a meeting can give people a seat at the table. Mr. Camacho said no one is truly under the middle; most people are in one direction or the other. The Unaffiliated voters make a difference.

About 2 hours and 15 minutes

Mr. Clark asked if the Commissioners would discuss the size of the Common Council and how much bigger they feel it should be and how it will impact this discussion. He said if they have more people on the Common Council, they will have an impact for more people to have a seat at the table.

Mr. Dickens asked how many people each Common Council member represents. Mr. Hempstead said during the 1980s, the population was around 72,000 and they had 15 Common Council members. The population now is around 93,000 and the Common Council representation has not increased.

Mr. Mednick said they will discuss four year terms vs. two year terms at the next meeting along with the roles of Sheriff and Constable and Common Council vacancies.

Mr. Clark asked if any Charter talks about Common Council size that is tied to a city's population. Mr. Mednick said it does not; basically it is local preference or tradition. He said he will look at redistricting and if City Hall has any historical data as to when the Common Council shifter in size.

VI. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

About 2 hours and 20 minutes

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES**

B. REGULAR MEETING: DECEMBER 3, 2024

Mr. Levin said he read his changes and forward them to the Commission members.

**** MR. LEVIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE CHANGES TO THE MINUTES HE SENT TO THE COMMISSIONERS**

**** MOTION FAILED WITH TWO (2) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. BENNETT AND MR. LEVIN) AND SEVEN (7) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MR. CAMACHO; MR. CLARK; MR. DICKENS; MR. FAIRBAIRN; MR. HEMPSTEAD; MR. MCQUAID AND MS. RHODES-SMALL**

The following corrections were made to the December 3, 2024 minutes.

November meeting minutes were not passed unanimously with Mr. McQuaid and Mr. Levin abstaining

Add that Mr. Mednick said term limits can't be done.

**** THE MINUTES PASSED AS CORRECTED**

**** MR. LEVIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES**

B. Regular Meeting: December 17, 2024

The following corrections were made: add Mr. Clark under attendance and replace Ms. Dunn with Ms. Bennett

Mr. Levin requested concise minutes with a time stamp.

**** THE MINUTES PASSED AS CORRECTED**

**** MR. LEVIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES**

C. Regular Meeting: January 7, 2025

The following corrections were made: correct the spelling of Mr. Levin's name throughout. Change panel members to guests instead of staff and add their titles. Page 22 – Mr. Levin suggested moving Common Council compensation

**** THE MINUTES PASSED AS CORRECTED**

VI. ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. LEVIN MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further discussion, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services