

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 7, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Patsy Brescia, Chair; Richard McQuaid, Vice Chair; Carl Dickens, Tyler Fairbairn, Benita Watford, Michael Witherspoon

STAFF: Atty. Steven Mednick, consultant

OTHERS: Council President Greg Burnett, Attorney Edwin Camacho; Tom Ellis, Council Member Tom Livingston, Council Member Darlene Young, Henry M. Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Atty. Brian Candela, Associate City Attorney; Atty. Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Brescia called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called and a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

• November 16, 2022

**** MS. WATFORD MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 16, 2022 MEETING.**

**** MR. DICKENS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 16, 2022 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR (DICKENS, FAIRBAIRN AND WATFORD) AND TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (MCQUAID AND WITHERSPOON).**

**GENERAL AND CAPITAL FUND BUDGET PROCESS AND OPERATIONS:
PANEL DISCUSSION**

A. Henry M. Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer

B. Hon. Greg Burnett, President of Norwalk Common Council; Chair of Finance and Claims Committee

C. Hon. Darlene Young, Majority Leader Norwalk Common Council; Chair of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs Committee

D. Attorney Edwin Camacho, Chair of the Board of Estimate and Taxation

Atty. Mednick said that Council President Burnett had a schedule conflict and would be absent for part of the meeting. Atty. Mednick asked if there were specific issues or areas in the Charter that they should focus on. Ms. Brescia said that they would need to make it more understandable for the public.

Council President Burnett said that the current process is fairly efficient and would like to have the Council to have more input during the budget development process. Mr. Dachowitz then reviewed the Finance Departments role in the budget development. He said that the Finance Department and the Mayor review the various department budgets, which is the first step of the entire process. Discussion followed regarding the details of the budget development process.

Council President Burnett said that he would like to have an extended amount of time for review and discussion the budget. Mr. Dachowitz said that they had extended the budget schedule three years ago.

Atty. Mednick said that they could include some wording that would allow the budget to have some flexibility by using the phrase “not later than”. He added that the Legislature does have some provisions that allows the Council to amend the Charter regarding the budget schedules.

Mr. Dachowitz then reviewed the details of the budget timeline with the Commission.

Ms. Brescia said that the Charter mentions “public notice”, which refers to the newspaper. Atty. Mednick said that by changing the definition of “public notice” they could include electronic publication. Discussion followed about those individual who do not utilize websites.

Ms. Watford asked for clarification on the public hearings. Atty. Camacho explained that the public is able to come and give input to the BET and reviewed the details with her. Mr. Dachowitz explained that when the BET holds the public hearing, the special meeting is held a week later. He then proceeded to give all the details and deadlines involved in submitting the budget request, the review of requests for both Capital and Operating budgets.

Mr. Dachowitz noted that all of the Planning and Zoning documents are required to have a link back to the Master Plan of Conservation and Development by State regulations.

Atty. Mednick noted that he had just worked with two municipalities where they included this requirement in their Charter since many municipalities do not take the State requirement to revise their Master Plan of Conservation and Development every ten years.

The discussion then returned to the detailed timeline of the budget process.

At the end of the summary, Ms. Brescia asked if anyone was advocating that the Council have the authority to do something different than their current role.

The discussion moved to various Capital Project approvals and the actual funding for those projects that might involve potential borrowing. Mr. Dachowitz then gave an overview of the borrowing strategies.

Discussion followed about the impact of the budget cap on the rating agencies.

LEGAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CURRENT CHARTER:

Presentation by Corporation Counsel Mario Coppola

Atty. Mednick introduced Atty. Coppola, the City Corporation Counsel, and Atty. Candela, Associate Corporation Counsel. Atty. Coppola and Atty. Candela greeted the Commissioners.

Atty. Mednick said that he had asked Atty. Coppola to highlight any potential problem areas for the Commission. Atty. Mednick reminded everyone that the Commission would be writing the Charter for the public, for the Mayor, the Council and other public officials. However, the Corporation Counsel staff routinely work with the Charter.

Atty. Coppola asked if the Commissioners had an opportunity to read the memo that he had sent out. Ms. Brescia said it arrived late in the afternoon. Atty. Coppola said that the memo was intended to provide the Commission with a basis for discussion and questions.

Atty. Coppola then gave a brief overview of the memo and noted that he would indicate which staff member would be the best one to contact regarding various issues.

Regarding Charter Section 1-241 – Division of Purchasing, Atty. Coppola noted that it might be worthwhile to make the provisions more consistent with the federal procurement standards for large cities in Connecticut. He said that if Atty. Mednick would like assistance in this area, Atty. Tyisha Toms would be the staff member to contact. Discussion followed.

Regarding Charter Section 1- 444 which has to do with sidewalks, Atty. Coppola noted that the City has a desire to increase the amount of sidewalks. The Corporation Counsel's Office has been researching the best practices in terms of obtain property for sidewalks. Atty. Tyisha Toms would be the staff member to contact. Ms. Brescia said that she had been involved in working on the development of foot paths for the students to use in going to and from school.

Atty. Coppola then spoke about Charter Section 1-89 and 1- 226 that addresses the powers and duties of the Mayor. He noted that since Norwalk has grown, obtaining the Mayor's signature on documents can become problematic since the Mayor is a very busy man.

Regarding Articles 5, there is some outdated language that should be reviewed. Atty. Coppola also suggested that Atty. Mednick review Article 8. Atty. Callahan would be the resource for questions about the Parking Department. The discussion moved to the possibility of including the process for creating a department.

Atty. Coppola said that he would also recommend reviewing Article 15 – Streets, Sidewalks and Building Lines, which Atty. Toms would be the appropriate resource. Ms. Brescia asked about the role of Planning and Zoning in this area. Discussion followed.

Atty. Coppola said that he would handle questions about Section 1-230 regarding the employment of attorney and he noted that the language was inconsistent. Discussion followed.

The final section that Atty. Coppola recommended for review was Section 1-63 – Payment to widows, which apparently involved payments to a widow in 1955. He suggested that this be eliminated completely.

Atty. Coppola said that his department would be available to assist Atty. Mednick and the Commission with any questions they may have. Atty. Mednick said that he would be in contact with Atty. Coppola as they went through the Charter. Atty. Candela said that they had asked the Law Office staff to review areas of the Charter and bring any issues forward. He felt that they had brought all the issues forward and appreciated Atty. Mednick's efforts.

COMMENTS BY COMMISSION COUNSEL

Atty. Mednick said that they would be reviewing Articles 1 through 3 and he would attempt to provide the Commissioners with an outline. He noted one area that he would be verifying with Corporation Counsel. He added that they could also discuss what they would like to see in the budget process. Discussion followed.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. MCQUAID MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THERE WAS A SECOND.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk
Charter Revision Commission
Regular Meeting
December 7, 2022