

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
NOVEMBER 2, 2022**

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

STAFF: Atty. Steven Mednick, consultant

OTHERS: Betty Ressel, Evergreen Solutions

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Brescia called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called and a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

• October 26, 2022

**** A MOTION WAS MADE TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 26, 2022.**

The following corrections were noted:

Under **OTHERS:** please correct the following names:

“Colin Hostin” to “Colin Hosten”
“Diane Carpio” to “Diana Carpio”
“Diana Lauricella” to “Diane Lauricella”

Page 6, paragraph 5: please change the following from:

“The discussion moved to the definition of “term limits”, which would limit the number of terms that an individual could serve.

Ms. Brescia noted that Atty. Mednick had done this with numerous other towns in Connecticut.”

TO:

The discussion moved to the definition of “term limits”, which are under the jurisdiction of the State.

Ms. Brescia noted that Atty. Mednick had been counsel for nine of the largest cities in Connecticut.

**** THERE WAS A SECOND.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 26, 2022 AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION REGARDING “EFFICIENCY STUDY OF THE CITY OF NORWALK AND NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MARCH 22, 2022” WITH BETTY RESSELL OF EVERGREEN SOLUTIONS

Ms. Ressel greeted the Commissioners and said that she was from Evergreen Solutions. After reviewing the Charter last year, she found it was a hodgepodge of statements that were in conflict or outdated. This resulted in the recommendations made in the final report. Later she withdrew her recommendation regarding corrections and said that the Charter needed to be completely re-written. She gave a brief overview of some of the problem areas.

Ms. Ressel said that there were a number of fixes in the previous Charter presentation but the Charter rejected the proposed document. She said that the manner in which the Commission addresses each of the concerns needs to be divided into two phases. The first step is producing a clean, restructured charter and then have a second Charter revision for reviewing the roles of the Mayor and other elected officials. Evergreen believes that a rewrite of the Charter will shape Norwalk’s future. Once that is completed, a Commission can focus on reworking the ordinances. She gave several examples of how this could be done. Discussion followed.

Ms. Ressel said that she had looked at Atty. Mednick’s proposed reorganization and that he had done an excellent job of gathering the scattered pieces back together. Once they have that done, it will be important to have a presentation for the public and explain that they had identified the key components and removed irrelevant items.

Atty. Mednick said that there were a number of excellent suggestions in the Evergreen report such as delineating the various departments. He gave an overview about the Taxing Districts and reminded everyone that those are not something the Commission would be addressing. However, the voting districts need to be defined, but not described. Much of what the current Charter is unworkable and archaic. This is an opportunity to create a model charter.

Ms. Ressel repeated her comment that the Commission’s focus at this stage of the game should be on the structure of the charter. Once that is approved by the voters, the Commission can

address the more controversial topics one or two at a time. Ms. Ressel said that when she had spoken to several of the Council Members, each person had certain concerns that they would like to have addressed. However, those issues will be part of Phase 2 and this needs to be communicated to them clearly.

DISCUSSION OF LEGAL ISSUES

Atty. Mednick reminded everyone that there would be new things added to the Charter, such as hybrid meetings and possibly adding a glossary. He said that there would be some departments that would be moved to a “sunset chapter” which will be eliminated as those departments are adopted into the ordinances. This will allow for continuity.

Ms. Brescia spoke about the role of the Taxing Districts, voter districts, and other municipal districts needed to be clarified to the public.

Mr. McQuaid said that the Commission needs to assemble their goals for this revision project and to construct their new Charter. Ms. Brescia asked how the physical description of the City plays into the goals. Discussion followed about creating a plain language Charter so that the citizens can understand the function of the government.

The discussion moved to the description and definition of the Taxing Districts, which define which services the various residents receive.

Atty. Mednick said that while it was important to review the Charter every ten years or so to consider situations that have changed such as hybrid meetings that were introduced in the last three years, or posting notices via social media. However, most of the changes should be taking place in the ordinances. He added that all the City officials and the departments must comply with the Charter. There are no separate Charters for any department in the City of Norwalk. The Taxing Districts have separate rules and rights that were apparently granted by Special Acts.

He reminded everyone that collective bargaining agreements have the force of law. He said that he would recommend a mandatory review of the ordinances every five years. There should also be a review of the Charter every 10 years and an automatic review of the ordinances following any Charter revision.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON SCHEDULE

Ms. Brescia then gave a brief overview of the next steps and Atty. Mednick said that he would draft up a comment board within the next week.

Atty. Mednick recommended that they lay out their goals and then bring in the finance department to discuss their operations in terms of the Budget operation. He said that he would

work on gender neutrality and clarifying the language so that everyone will understand. This will include defining some of the terms such as “notice” and the roles of the Town Clerk and the City Clerk.

Mr. McQuaid said that he would not be present for the next meeting.

Ms. Brescia asked if everyone had received copies of the Evergreen Report and the minutes from the 2016 Charter Commission. She also said that they did not receive copies of the various Districts.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. WATFORD MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. WITHERSPOON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services