City of Norwalk
Charter Revision Commission
Regular Meeting
February 15, 2023

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

Other: Steven Mednick, Commission Counsel, Sarah Gallagher, Vinny DiGilio, Tyisha Walker-Meyers

1) CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Brescia called the meeting to order at 6:33.

2) ROLL CALL

A quorum was present.

3) APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

******Mr. McQuaid moved to approve the minutes of February 1, 2023**
******Ms. Raleigh seconded the motion.**
******The motion passed unanimously with the spelling correction as noted.**

Mr. Fairbarn pointed out that Mr. McQuaid's name was spelled incorrectly in the sixth paragraph in the discussion section of the minutes.

4) PANEL ON TERM OF OFFICE, VACANCIES AND SUCCESSION

• 4 years - Mayor/2 years - Hybrid Council: Hon. Sarah Gallagher, Councilmember and Chair, 2022 Charter Commission (Hamden)
• 2 years – Mayor and Hybrid Council: Vinny DiGilio, Council President (Danbury)
• 2 years – Mayor and Alders: Hon. Tyisha Walker-Meyers, President of the Board of Alders (New Haven)
• 4 years – Mayor and Council: Hon. Maly Rosado, President of the Common Council (Hartford)

Mr. Mednick discussed the panel members he invited, and mentioned that Maly Rosado was unable to attend at the last minute. Each member of the panel introduced themself and discussed the city they represent.

Ms. Walker-Meyers explained that New Haven is currently going through the same process, and offers her assistance in going through the options.

Ms. Gallagher discussed how Hamden went from two year terms to four year terms and the reasons why, and how it was received by the public.

Mr. DiGilio discussed the hybrid system in use in Danbury. Some offices have two year terms, some four.

Mr. Mednick pointed out that the charters include a line of succession, whether they have two or four year terms. Mr. Digilio explained Danbury's line of succession.

Mr. McQuaid asked about salary for councilman. In Danbury they are volunteers. In Hamden, there is a small stipend. New Haven also has a small stipend. He also asked if town clerks were appointed or elected officials. In Danbury they are elected. In Hamden they are elected, and in New Haven they are elected for two year terms.

Ms. Brescia asked if having longer terms attracts a higher quality of candidate. All agree that it does.

Ms. Watsunna asked if anyone on the panel was in favor of a two year term. Most agree a four year term offers more continuity.

Ms. Gallagher talked about how her committee shared information on the changes to their charter and offered to share a pamphlet they had created during the process.

Mr. Mednick explained what the Explanatory Text is and how it functions

Mr. Dickens thanked the panel and stated his concern is how the charter revision changes are communicated to the public. Ms. Gallagher explained Hamden's approach including public comment and public hearings. Hamden also had a page on the town website that was updated as changes were made.

Ms. Raleigh expressed concern that the public at large is unaware that a charter revision is happening at all. Ms. Gallagher made the point that zoom calls were helpful in that they were more accessible to citizens.

Mr. Witherspoon asked if it was possible to ask for a budget to place paid public notices in the media. Mr. Mednick felt this may be restricted by campaign finance laws.

Mr. McQuaid will reach out to a contact in the press to see if they can get some coverage. He also feels a charter revision website should be created.

Mr. Mednick made the point that it is important to communicate that the revision is restructuring the charter document, not the government. He will create a document of summaries of what they are creating.

After the panel discussion on term limits, Mr. Dickens feels the four year terms are the way to go for both the council and the mayor. Mr. Fairbairn likes four year terms that are staggered every two years between the council and the mayor.

All agree that the paragraph on succession is messy and needs clarification and clear guidelines and consistent standards.

5) ISSUES DISCUSSION

6) FURTHER REVIEW AND PRELIMINARY ACTION: ARTICLE X – BUDGET ISSUES

Mr. Mednick will have this section ready for review at the next meeting.

7) COUNSEL DISCUSSION OF STATUS – WHAT'S NEXT?

(a) ARTICLES I – III, IX, XI, XII

(b) ARTICLES IV AND V (THE COUNCIL AND THE MAYOR)

Mr. Mednick will have a further revision on these sections with some refinement at the next meeting.

Mr. Mednick made the point that the Municipal Powers Act covers a great deal of ordinances that do not need to be included in the Charter.

He also said that he met with the Mayor's office and went over every board and commission, and all the departments. This section makes up the last two sections of the charter.

The goal is to have all of the initial drafting done by mid-March. After that it is a matter of editing for readability and accessibility.

Mr. Mednick asked the commission to continue to send in their editorial comments and suggestions.

8) ADJOURNMENT

******Mr. McQuaid moved to adjourn the meeting.**
******Mr. Fairbairn seconded the motion.**
******The motion passed unanimously.**

Chairman Brescia adjourned the meeting at 8:35.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Chaple
Telesco Secretarial Services