

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 28, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: William Fitzgerald, Chairman; Jerry Petrini, Vice Chairman;
Stephen Keogh, Yvonne Rodriguez, Michael Witherspoon (6:48),
Glenn Iannaccone

ABSENT: Mary Roman

STAFF: Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel

OTHERS: Stuart Wells, Democratic Registrar, Karen Doyle Lyons,
Republican Registrar, Lisa Thomson, Diane Lauricella

ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m. by Mr. Fitzgerald. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**** MR. IANNACONE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE
MARCH 9, 2016 MEETING.**

**** MS. RODRIGUEZ SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Fitzgerald commended the Commission for its hard work and dedication. In addition to the six charges of the Common Council, he said they also addressed the important issue of gender neutral language. Mr. Fitzgerald said he was somewhat surprised and dismayed by the public comments that the Commission did not address the important issues of the City of Norwalk. He said he expected the folks that attended these meetings would raise these issues with their elected officials and certainly during the time of a Council election process and to suggest the Commission did not keep their eye on the ball was unfounded and unfair. Mr. Fitzgerald said the Commission worked hard on the six issues of what it was charged with and listened to the citizens of Norwalk.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked for the Commission members to comment on the last public hearing.

Mr. Iannaccone said one of the most interesting speakers was the one who said what is needed is continuous Charter Revision. Mr. Iannaccone said there is a lot to do to bring the Charter up to the 21st Century.

Ms. Rodriguez said it was pleasure and an honor to work on the Commission.

Mr. Petrini added the Commission had been clear since Day 1 it was only going to work on the changes the Council asked us to do. He said if the public wanted us to make additional changes we needed guidance from the Council or it was not going to happen. Mr. Petrini said he reached out to the Majority Leader, Minority Leader and the Council President and the answer was no. He said he can understand the frustration of people who want certain changes, but he said the public is looking for us to make the change. Mr. Petrini said everything the public asked was heard.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Witherspoon entered the meeting at 6:48 p.m.

Mr. Keogh said he prepared a draft report to the Council with exhibits. He said there were two versions. The earlier version included proposed grammatical, stylistic and typographical changes from the Corporation Counsel. The second one was passed out at the beginning of the meeting and contained a slightly updated draft with some additional information and language added.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked if the Commission would be comfortable discussing the report without going into Executive Session. The members agreed for the discussion to be public.

Mr. Keogh read from the introduction of the report. There were no changes to the introduction.

Mr. Keogh then read from the four proposed changes to text and discussion.

Shall the term of the Mayor and Town Clerk be changed from two to four years?

The report stated the term of Mayor and Town Clerk be changed to four years and the Commission is unanimous in its support. It went on to state the procedure for the ability to fill the vacancy in the office of Mayor at the next municipal election. The report stated a 4-year term will promote effective administration in both offices.

The report stated the duties of the Town Clerk are almost entirely administrative. The duties are extensive and complex and include land records, vital statistics and the issue of absentee ballots. The 4-year term gives even a new Town Clerk the time for him or herself a chance to become comfortable with those responsibilities.

The report stated the duties of Mayor are more political but the administrative duties are important too. There is an extensive learning curve and the longer term will allow the Mayor to learn the ropes before being judged on his or her performance. It would also allow a longer time to focus on policy decisions. The report cited the increased costs of Mayoral elections where the Mayor will have to fundraise from the beginning of the 2-year term. While this may give voters fewer opportunities to hold the Mayor accountable, the 4-year term will be a long enough period to judge the entirety of that term at the next election.

The 4-year term could cause some falloff in voter turnout at the Municipal elections. The Commission conceded there will be some falloff, but does not recommend any changes to any other election terms or timetables. This will minimize confusion in the electoral process.

The second question to appear on the ballot is:
Should the offices of City Treasurer, City Sheriff and Selectmen be eliminated?

In the original charter of 1913, the positions had specific duties. The report stated that these offices have lost any real function in Norwalk. The elimination would not cause a loss of any government functions. It will bring a small cost savings and more importantly the shortening of the municipal ballot to the point that the ballot may be printed on one side.

Should the annual salary of each Council member be set at 2% of the base salary of the Mayor?

The report stated a Common Council member's salary is currently fixed at \$600 a year. It is an extraordinarily time consuming and important function. The current salary was set in 1980 and does not approach a fair amount of compensation. But at the same time the report stated it did not want service to become a money-making opportunity. The new compensation based on 2% of the Mayor's salary would be \$2,281.70 and could rise appropriately for inflation.

Mr. Keogh said the Common Council will not vote for runaway Mayor salaries to increase their own compensation. The report stated the increase would not be a hardship to the City budget.

Mr. Fitzgerald said he strongly suggested the Commission go ahead with this proposal and stated a salary of \$600 is an insult. Mr. Petrini cited the election costs and expenses a Council member endures.

Shall all references to members of the Common Council be gender neutral?

The next recommendation was all references in the Charter to Council Members be gender neutral. The report states this is one proposal that falls outside the Commission's charge. The Charter was adopted approximately seven years before women obtained the right to vote and this is a long overdue and important recognition and should be free of any language to even suggest gender bias of any sort.

The report did not recommend Mayoral term limits. The public has been quite happy to eject Norwalk Mayors and only one Norwalk Mayor has served more than 8 years in the last 100 years.

The Commission did not recommend any changes to Common Council terms. Common council members benefit from the close contact with the electorate that biennial elections entail and these elections are less expensive and require less fundraising.

Mr. Iannaccone added there is no recall mechanism for the Common Council. Mr. Keogh said he would add this point to the report.

Mr. Fitzgerald said it was clear citizens wanted a 2-year term for Common Council members. He said the Commission is grateful for the public input. He said this was an example of the Commission listening to the citizens.

The Commission did not recommend any changes to the terms or election cycles of the Board of Education. The Commission received input and the BOE strongly opposed any changes to the terms of its members.

The Commission proposed that all changes take place in November 2017. Mayor and Town Clerk would be running for a 4-year term in 2017 and if adopted no candidates would be running for City Sheriff, Selectmen or City Treasurer.

Mr. Petrini said the goal was to have as many people vote on this as possible and that is the reason Charter Revision will be voted on in a Presidential election year.

Mr. Keogh said it is better for the Mayor and Town Clerk to run when Town Clerk and Mayor coincide with at-large BOE elections.

Mr. Coppola has suggested in addition to the exhibits, the report make reference to the fact that the Commission solicited and received extensive legal research from the Corporation Counsel.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked about Exhibit 1, line 5 which included the seven Constables. Mr. Keogh said the report will not eliminate the election of the Constables. Mr. Petrini said the Commission was never charged with looking at the Constables. Mr. Coppola agreed that the Commission leave the Constables alone. Mr. Wells said the seven Constables will appear on the back of the ballot. Mr. Fitzgerald said people will ask if the Board of

Education races will be on the back of the ballot, but Mr. Wells said they will not be on the back.

Mr. Petrini read from his addendum to the report.

He said six topics were clearly indicated by the Common Council. The addendum said the Commission not only has the power to present its opinion but could recommend any additional changes only by a simple majority vote. Mr. Petrini said the decision was to only investigate the six charges in addition to adding gender neutral language to the Charter. It is a small but very important change that should have been done years ago. Four referendums and the gender neutral language change were brought forth to the Council for possible inclusion on this year's ballot with the Council's approval.

Mr. Petrini stated at the February 10 public hearing there were 21 speakers. At the second public hearing on March 22 there were 9 speakers, 3 first time speakers and 6 individuals who had been heard from. He said the issues raised included unfair practice on beach stickers at Calf Pasture, higher out of district water rates, a citizen's review board, eliminate or change the redevelopment agency, hire a city manager and eliminate non-substantiated language in the Charter.

Mr. Petrini said one topic that 7 of the 24 speakers commented on was the restructuring of Planning and Zoning Department and hire a city planner that would head the department. He said the Council will hear more about this issue and the Commission suggested the Council listen and look at this matter further and look at another Charter Revision Commission or this Commission could be reconvened with your permission.

**** MS. RODRIUEZ MOVED TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CHARTER AND THE ADDENDUM.**

**** MR. IANNACONE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. IANNACONE MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. KEOGH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

G. Venuto
Telesco Secretarial Services

DRAFT