

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 22, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: William Fitzgerald, Chairman; Jerry Petrini, Vice Chairman; Stephen Keogh, Michael Witherspoon, Mary Roman, Glenn Iannaccone, Yvonne Rodriguez (6:37)

STAFF: Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel

OTHERS: Karen Doyle Lyons, Adolph Nederland, Stuart Wells, Lisa Thomson, Dave Davidson, Elsa Obuchowski, Heather Dunn, Mike Barbis, Robert Hard, Andy Conroy

ROLL CALL

The public hearing was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Mr. Fitzgerald.

Mr. Fitzgerald underscored how hard the group was working and thanked the public for attendance. He also thanked Mr. Wells for his work and Mr. Coppola for his efforts.

Ms. Rodriguez joined the hearing at 6:37 p.m.

The meeting began with a Power Point presentation by Mr. Keogh that outlined what the Commission was charged to look at and its proposed changes to the Charter.

Mr. Keogh said the Commission was charged by the Common Council and the Council recommended looking at the following changes to the Charter:

- 1) Amend Section 1-166 to provide that elections for Mayor and Town Clerk occur every four years rather than biennially.
- 2) If the Mayoral term is increased to four years then consider limiting the Mayor to 2 terms.
- 3) Investigate extending the terms of Town Clerk, Common Council members and other city officials to 4 years.
- 4) Investigate the possibility of adjusting Board of Education members to all run in the same year.

5) Amend Section 1-166 and related sections to eliminate positions (and salaries) of the Selectmen, City Treasurer and City Sheriff.

6) To amend section 1-215 and 1-224 to remove references to the salaries of city officials removed and further to that having the salary of city officials set by the Board of Taxation and Finance.

Mr. Keogh said the Commission held an initial organizational meeting, then a public hearing, received and reviewed written comments from the public, civic bodies and elected officials including the Corporation Counsel's Office and held two meetings where public input was reviewed.

Mr. Keogh said the commission will submit its report by April 5 to the Common Council and it will ultimately decide whether to send the recommendations of the Commission on to the voters or not.

The draft proposals are:

Amend Section 1-166 to provide that elections for Mayor and Town Clerk occur every four years rather than biennially.

Amend Section 1-166 and related sections to eliminate positions (and salaries) of the Selectmen, City Treasurer and City Sheriff.

Amend 1-225 to provide the salary of a Common council member will be a fixed 2% of the Mayor's base salary.

Amend the Charter as a whole to make it gender neutral.

The final draft proposal is for technical changes for the adjustment of the offices eliminated and adjusting the mechanism for filling an unexpired term.

Mr. Keogh said the following was charged but not proposed:

No change to Common Council election term or cycle. Both at-large and in district be elected every two years.

No change to Board of Education election term or cycle.

No imposition of term limits.

Mr. Keogh displayed what the amended sections of the Charter would look like after the proposed edits were made.

Mr. Keogh explained a provision for what happens if a Mayor leaves office before the 4-year term has expired.

Mr. Keogh said currently Section 1-174 states with a 2-year Mayoral term the Common Council President would become Mayor. The proposal states if a vacancy occurs and the

term exceeds 30 months a special election coinciding with the next Common Council Election will be held to complete the term only.

The following Sections stand to be deleted

1-215 Salary of Selectmen of the Town of Norwalk

1-216 Powers and duties of Selectmen

1-224 Salaries of the officers of the City and Town of Norwalk

1-246 City Treasurer

Technical Revision

Mr. Keogh said this is not a substantive change.

Mr. Keogh said the Charter states within 10 days of election the Mayor has to appoint two members to the Board of Estimate and Taxation to serve 4-year terms. He said this would be thrown off by a 4-year term for Mayor. The Commission has recommended the Charter state the Mayor will be able to name two members every two years.

Mr. Petrini said the Commission is going to put together a memo for the Common Council of any suggestions put forth by the citizens at the first public hearing and in written submissions. He mentioned some of the issues to be noted in his report included Planning & Zoning, the need for a City Planner, out of district water rates, resident stickers at Calf Pasture and the possibility of a City Manager system. He said the public comments have been heard and he expects a new Commission be convened in the future.

Ms. Karen Doyle Lyons 58 Spring Hill Avenue introduced herself saying she is the Republican Registrar and a member of the Common Council for 2 terms. Ms. Lyons recommend to the Commission to not put too many revisions on the ballot because she said the electors will not review them. She agreed that the Mayor and Town Clerk should have 4 year terms. Ms. Lyons said she favored eliminating Selectmen, City Treasurer and Sheriff from the ballot. She said many voters do not review the back of the ballot. She said we pay for each column on the ballot and elections are not cheap. She said taxpayers want to save money and she wants to save them money. Ms. Lyons said Constables and Sheriff basically do the same thing. She said they can be eliminated from the ballot and all can appointed that would give you eight. Ms. Lyons said there is no need for a City Manager.

Mr. Adolph Nederland 1 Greenhill Road said he was against the 4-year term for Mayor based on recent experience. Mr. Nederland said he was dismayed that at the previous meetings almost every speaker stressed the need for a City Planner. He said what has happened to the city is a function of Planning & Zoning and not anything the Commission has addressed.

Mr. Nederland referenced the March 9 draft minutes and said the focus was limited to Mayor's term, Constables and salaries. He said Mr. Petrini's list of seven points noted the need for a City Planner at the top of the list and that has not been addressed. He said not having a City Planner has created a high-density downtown with over 3,000 new residential units and the City should not be surprised the schools are overwhelmed.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the Commission has worked hard and there is short window of time, but will pass Mr. Nederland's comments on to the Common Council.

Mr. Stuart Wells 224 West Norwalk Road, the Democratic Registrar, showed a slide of what a ballot would look like this fall. He said there is room for about six questions and they could be at the top or bottom of the ballot. Mr. Wells stated there is room for about 15 columns, the rest will go on the back, but he said in 2019 the ballot could be single-sided.

Mr. Wells said he supported council member's salary being 2% of the Mayor's salary and he said the Council can move the amount for inflation.

Ms. Lisa Thomson 24 Highland Avenue was the next speaker. She thanked the Commission for their service and she agreed with the three items the Commission is leaving alone and with a 4-year term for Mayor. She said the new term for Mayor should not start until 2019 to not give an advantage to the incumbent.

Ms. Thomson said city planning is not well coordinated with zoning. Ms. Thomson recommended that the Commission prepare a strongly worded memo to the Council and not make it just a grocery list. She said the public has been asking for changes in Planning & Zoning for three years. Ms. Thompson said this specific area of the Charter has not been looked at since 1971.

Mr. Dave Davidson 16 Belmarlea Road stressed the majority of the public has addressed Public Zoning. He said a simple change to Section 1-189.2. will allow the Common Council to deal with this issue. Mr. Davidson said the Commission has the authority to deal with any issues.

Mr. Petrini said he has addressed this issue with the Minority Leaders, the Majority Leaders and the Council President. He said the Commission can look at anything they want, but said it probably would not get voted in. Mr. Petrini said the Council never came back to the Commission to include this.

Mr. Davidson said the Commission has the ultimate responsibility and accountability. He said the public does not care about whether or not there are Constables. He said the public cares about the Planning & Zoning issues.

Mr. Petrini said he understands that, but said he does care about what the elected officials have asked the Commission to do.

Mr. Fitzgerald said it would not be a simple change as Mr. Davidson suggested. He said the Commission had not backed off any comments or submissions from the public.

Ms. Elsa Obuchowski of 41 East Avenue was the next speaker. She first spoke on behalf of the District A Democratic Committee. She said they wanted to know what is being done about Planning & Zoning. She said they wanted to say Norwalk needs better planning and zoning and needs to follow a long-term plan. She said a majority supported a 4-year term for Mayor and no change to the Board of Election terms.

Ms. Obuchowski said she is happy about gender neutral language, but said she prefers Council Member over Council Representative. She added she disagreed with the Zoning Commission Chair's online comment that the library parking problem is not about poor zoning. She said if we had sound accountable city planning the library problem would be solved.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the Commission will recommend that Councilman be changed to Council Member.

Mr. Nederland said he would suggest that the Common Council be told the people want something else. Mr. Petrini said that will be done.

Ms. Heather Dunn, President of Nash and a Silvermine resident, was the next speaker. She said there are so many issues facing the city including building and transportation and has it has been such a long process to open up the Charter. Ms. Dunn said residents are concerned with density and it is self-serving for the Council that it only take on issues that effect them. She said the report should state that more time is needed to do an adequate job.

Ms. Thomson said if the public feels it was ignored there could be a vote no campaign on Charter Revision. Mr. Keogh said he has seen a number of Charter Revisions and said it has never been without such a campaign.

Mr. Fitzgerald said if the Council comes back and asked them to look into additional matters and if his fellow Commission members are available they will do it.

Mr. Mike Barbis 1 Covewood Drive he said knowing people on the Council the Council wanted to get through the issues and were concerned if they added Planning and Zoning to the charges it would not go anywhere. Mr. Barbis wanted to discuss the implementation date. He asked if it would be 2017 or 2019 and stated it may more fair to wait to 2019.

Mr. Robert Hard 213 Wolfpit Avenue said it is possible to have Charter Revision more often. He said maybe the Charter can be continuously updated. Mr. Hard said the Charter can be condensed. He said maybe it can be amended bit by bit.

Mr. Andy Conroy 17 Old With Court said he agreed with the 4-year term for Mayor and said he supported starting in 2019. He said council terms should be 2 years.

Ms. Lyons agreed that council terms should remain at 2 years.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting is scheduled for March 28, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. in Council Chambers.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** MR. PETRINI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** MR. KEOGH SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

G. Venuto
Telesco Secretarial Services