

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 22, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: William Fitzgerald, Chairman; Jerry Petrini, Vice Chairman;
Stephen Keogh (6:36), Yvonne Rodriguez, Michael Witherspoon,
Glenn Iannaccone

ABSENT: Mary Roman

STAFF: Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel

OTHERS: Stuart Wells, Democratic Registrar and Lisa Thomson

ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm. by Mr. Fitzgerald. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**** MR. PETRINI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY
10 , 2016 PUBLIC HEARING**
**** MR. WITHERSPOON SECONDED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Fitzgerald said it was a great turnout for the public hearing and it is democracy in action.

Mr. Fitzgerald said making the Charter gender neutral should be a priority. He said that is one thing that can be carefully considered.

He proposed future meeting dates for March including a second public hearing.

Mr. Keogh joined the meeting at 6:36 pm.

The first meeting will be a regular meeting on March 9 at 6:30 pm. in Room 101. He said March 14 will be a tentative meeting date if needed.

The public hearing will be held on Tuesday March 22 at 6:30 pm. in the Community Room. The final work session before presenting the report to the Common Council will be March 28 at 6:30 pm. in Room 101.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked the Commission members for their thoughts and comments on the public hearing.

Mr. Petrini spoke first and said the hearing was very informative. He said he would want to first work on the six directives they were charged with. He said they need to listen to the Council representatives that formed the Commission.

Mr. Petrini added he wants people to know they were heard. Mr. Coppola said he recommended a memo to the file containing other issues that may be looked at another time if a future Commission is formed. Mr. Petrini will draft the memo.

Mr. Petrini mentioned a number of speakers asking about hiring a City Planner. Mr. Coppola said the issue of hiring a City Planner make be addressed with a future hire.

Mr. Iannaccone also mentioned many of the speakers favored a City Planner position. He said he did not feel that was the job of the Commission. Mr. Iannaccone mentioned the lack of a recall for Council members and he said it is something they need to look at if they extend Council terms to 4 years.

Mr. Witherspoon said most people seemed to favor a 4-year term for Mayor and more people seemed to be against term limits. He added that nobody spoke about the Town Clerk being possibly changed to a 4-year term.

Ms. Rodriguez said she supported a 4-year term for Mayor and 2 years for Board of Education and Common Council. She was concerned about lower voter turnout if too many terms ended on the same year.

Mr. Keough said he agreed with Mr. Petrini and said the Commission has a limited amount of time. He said the Commission has to be careful about one change does not cause a problem somewhere else.

Mr. Keough agreed with making the Charter gender neutral. A discussion followed if this proposal should be presented on its own or linked to one of the other six charges if it were to be on the ballot.

If 4-year terms are recommended, Mr. Keough said the options are to stagger the council elections or to have everybody run with the Mayor the same year.

Mr. Fitzgerald invited Mr. Wells to speak. Mr. Wells handed out some sample ballots to demonstrate what it could like if Treasurer, Selectman, Constables and Sheriff were removed.

Mr. Wells said to create a single-sided ballot then Sheriff, Selectman, Constables and Treasurer would have to be removed. He does not recommend having the City Council At Large and City Council In District with 4 years terms on the same cycle because the turnout will be very low. Mr. Wells said if the decision is to go 4 years then stagger the elections the same way the Board of Education does.

Mr. Keogh said three things have to be drafted. The first thing is the actual proposed changes to the Charter, second the questions that go on the ballot and the third is the the report of why the changes were made.

Mr. Keogh said assuming a change to a 4-year Mayor term he came up with 7 possibilities:

- 1) Leave everything alone.
- 2) 4 year terms for all council members all running in the same year as the Mayor.
- 3) 4 year terms for all council members running in the non-Mayor year.
- 4) 2 year terms for District Council and 4 years terms for At-Large Council with the At-Large running in the same year as the Mayor.
- 5) Same as No. 4 except At-Large running in the non-Mayor years.
- 6) 4-year terms for all Council members but having them staggered. At-Large running in Mayor years and District members running in Non-Mayor years.
- 7) Would be to reverse No. 6.

Mr. Keogh said you could argue both ways. He said one possibility is holding all District elections in the off-year to generate local interest. Mr. Keogh said if it works that's great, but if it does not work you could have the greatest number of Council members elected with the lowest turnout. He said does not want to complicate the process because that may even hinder turnout more.

Mr. Petrini said the Commission seemed to favor a 4-year term for Mayor, but he said for accountability of Council members he was leaning toward 2 years. He said a member could do a lot of damage with a 4-year term.

He feels the Board of Education is working and he would keep terms at 2 years.

Mr. Wells said having all of the Council running without the Mayor could be the best turnout for an off year.

Mr. Keogh said if you leave the Council the way it is then the decision is should the Mayor run with At-Large BOE or In-District BOE.

Mr. Petrini said by keeping the Council terms at 2 years the public may have less of a problem with setting their rate of pay. He proposed a formula of 1/15 of the Mayor's salary which would come to \$2,350 per Council member and the Board of Estimate could have the authority to modify the amount of compensation.

Mr. Petrini summed up the consensus of the Commission. He supported a 4-year term for Mayor and Town Clerk with no term limits. He recommended not touching the Council term or the Board of Education. Mr. Petrini proposed to amend the Charter to remove Constable, Selectman, Treasurer and Sheriff from the ballot. Constable will still exist but will be an appointed position. Mr. Petrini said he would like to do something about salaries for Council members and to change the language in the Charter to gender neutral.

Mr. Fitzgerald said he would like to possibly speak with the League of Women Voters and the Chamber of Commerce.

He then invited Ms. Thomson to speak. She said she favors 2-year terms for the Common Council and she can live with a 4-year term for Mayor as long as there is accountability.

Mr. Keogh read from the State statute that a Town can increase the number of Constables by Charter or Ordinance. Norwalk has 7, but the Commission proposed possibly having 3 Democrats, 3 Republicans and 3 unaffiliated.

Mr. Keogh pointed out the Board of Estimate language is tied to the election of the Mayor. The Mayor has to appoint members to the Board of Estimate within a week of taking office. But if the term extended to 4 years the Mayor would have no recourse to appoint additional members to the Board of Estimate that are expiring in another 2 years.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. PETRINI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. KEOGH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted

G. Venuto
Telesco Secretarial Services