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Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email the City Clerk's office at cityclerk@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 4, 2025
COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND VIA ZOOM**

ATTENDANCE: Tyler Fairbairn, Chair; Jo Bennett; James Clark; Carl Dickens;
Douglas Hempstead; John Levin; Richard McQuaid; Tanya Rhodes-Small

OTHERS: Steve Mednick, Commission Counsel

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Fairbairn called the Roll as indicated above.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION [1:13]

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Ms. Diane Lauricella addressed Common Council compensation, structure and size. She said that most Council members struggle because they are assigned to three to four committees. She said expanding the number of Common Council positions would open up more chances for people to run and would allow fewer committee assignments. Ms. Lauricella said that having fewer committee assignments would allow people to do their own homework.

Ms. Lauricella said she believes term limits are allowed in Connecticut and would like to know who told Attorney Mednick they were not allowed.

Ms. Lauricella asked the Commissioners to consider compensation and to look at how Bridgeport and other towns do it. She suggested finding an acceptable way to leave compensation off the table and putting it into an ordinance.

Ms. Lisa Brinton, Chair Independent Party commented on Mr. Camacho's remark about minority party representation being undemocratic. She said various forms of democratic voters exist. Independent and Unaffiliated voters want more balance. She said she hopes Mr. Camacho appreciates the doctrine of single party rule that can be seen at the national level.

Ms. Brinton said a decade with 24-25 offices held by one party, including the Mayor, Common Council and the Board of Education has fostered bullying by the Executive office and Superintendent's office and has failed to incorporate diverse ideas outside of the three minute public comments. The results have been a decline in the quality of life and school district standards. She said there needs to be a check and balance. Ms. Brinton said it would be great to grow the size of the Common Council.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

[9:32]

A. Structure of the Council - Council size, Minority Representation, Vacancies.

Regarding minority party representation, Mr. Hempstead noted that during Mayor Esposito's terms, the breakdown of the Common Council was never more than 13 – 2. Mr. Clark said he does not know how the districts are divided geographically. He said he would like to understand that more clearly. Mr. Mednick said he does not know if they have the breakdown along the new district lines. Mr. McQuaid said he believed they could be available at the next meeting or the meeting following that one. Mr. Mednick said generally there are strict rules on how to do redistricting.

Mr. Fairbairn said he was not a huge fan of increasing the number of Common Council members. He noted that Stamford has 40 and Greenwich 230 and believes Bridgeport has 20. He said he did not know if increasing the number achieves anything. He mentioned that District C had to find two replacements last summer when two Common Council members resigned. He said if they expand to five more, he is not sure they will be able to fill the seats.

Mr. Dickens asked about the number of people each Common Council member represents. Mr. Fairbairn said he believes that when they did the redistricting a shift was made to make it more even. Mr. Dickens asked how they arrived at 15 Common Council seats and when that started. He said he is trying to find a logical reason why they would increase the number of seats on the Common Council. He said he did not know if increasing the number would reduce the workload.

Mr. Hempstead said he read the original first meeting document incorporating the City of Norwalk and there were eight members of the Common Council. He said he was aware the number increased from 13 to 15 in 1970 when two at large seats were added. He said the population at the time was about 70,000.

Mr. Hempstead said the City has grown about 22,000 people since the 1980s and those people are getting less representation and it is a strain on the Common Council members.

Mr. Mednick explained that Waterbury went from a pure at large system to a district system with five mini districts. As a result, the Waterbury Alderman look more diverse than in the past and focuses on geographical representation.

Ms. Rhodes-Small said expanded representation will improve responsiveness and will add people of different backgrounds and will distribute the workload. If compensation is a concern, adding more Common Council members will increase costs. Ms. Rhodes-Small said if they

expand the number of Common Council members, people will feel like their voices will be heard. She noted that she does not know who her Common Council representatives are.

Mr. Fairbairn said compensation is a great point; however, at the last meeting, they decided they were not going to dictate that. He said if they want to pay people and expand the number of Common Council members then it becomes challenging. He said he did not know how expanding the Common Council would benefit the City.

Mr. McQuaid said he felt they should look at expanding the number of Common Council members, but felt it was wrong to add term length and compensation on the ballot. He said they should break this down to what they want to see on the ballot this year.

Mr. Mednick said they can go for a special act for term limits, but the fact is that special acts that exist were passed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is not part of the Charter Revision and is not an issue for Charter Revision. Mr. Mednick asked Mr. McQuaid if moving this out four years into the future would make a difference in the public's perception. Mr. McQuaid said he believes more people will vote for it in a non election year.

Mr. Dickens said if parties want more people on the Common Council, they need to do a better job of getting people to join their part and get great candidates.

Mr. Clark asked how many Common Council sub committees are there. Mr. Levin said there are 14 sub committees and believes they are staffed by different parties. He said there are 14 Democrats and one non majority person on the Common Council. As the only non-majority person on the Common Council that individual is assigned to every one of the committees.

Mr. Mednick said there is no perfect answers to this.

Mr. Fairbairn said there are eight committees and two *ad hoc* committees. Mr. Dickens said this limits the amount of time a Common Council member can serve their constituents. Mr. Mednick said these are very demanding jobs. Mr. McQuaid said that when he became a Council person it takes a life of its own and you need to have your family on board. It is a demanding job and takes up a lot of your time. Mr. Fairbairn said in theory the idea of more people allows you to divide the work in but it is the person doing the job.

Mr. Dickens suggested tabling this discussion. Mr. Fairbairn said that for now that was a good move.

Mr. Mednick will look at party composition and how many people each Common Council member represents. Mr. Hempstead said no committee can have more than seven members.

Mr. Levin said he would rather address the size of the Common Council head on and expanding size of the Common Council rather than tabling this. Mr. Fairbairn said there is information people need in order to make an informed decision. Mr. Mednick said it may be useful for everyone to look at the new map and said he will provide it to everyone.

Mr. Levin said he concurs with the chair and Mr. Dickens that expanding the Common Council will not alter the outcome in terms of party representation and that he did not see meaningful benefits in expanding the Common Council.

[56:26]

- ** MR. FAIRBAIRN MOVED TO LEAVE THE NUMBER OF COMMON COUNCIL MEMBERS AT 15**
- ** MOTION FAILED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR (MR. DICKENS; MR. LEVIN AND MR. FAIRBAIRN) AND FIVE (5) IN OPPOSITION (MS. BENNETT; MR. CLARK; MR. HEMPSTEAD; MR. MCQUAID AND MS. RHODES-SMALL)**

[57:31]

- ** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO TABLE COMMON COUNCIL SIZE AND MINORITY PARTY REPRESENTATION FOR MORE INFORMATION**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Mednick reviewed Vacancies in the Charter. He said there is no time frame and party members in the district vote on the replacement. He said he will develop a chart showing how other municipalities appoint a replacement in the event of a vacancy. He said Stamford and Norwalk tend to have parties make the choice.

Mr. Fairbairn said it would be helpful to have a timeframe, such as 90 days. Mr. Dickens said 90 days was too long and felt it could be done in 30 days because the leadership will know who they want. Mr. Hempstead said he would like to see the rules. Mr. Fairbairn suggested 60 days as a compromise. Mr. Dickens agreed with 60 days. Mr. Hempstead asked what you do with an unaffiliated voter because is based on two party rule. Mr. Mednick explained there are different mechanisms for dealing with this. The assumption is you replace an elected member from the same party.

Mr. Mednick said the idea of putting in a time frame makes sense if you are going to keep the current structure. Mr. Hempstead said he would be comfortable holding a special election if the position is not filled within 60 days. Mr. Levin said the vacancy question focuses on when or if

there is a need for a special election. Mr. Fairbairn said they need to decide if there is a time limit for the party to fill the seat.

Mr. Dickens said that if someone leaves, their party has 60 days to appoint a replacement. If that is not done within 60 days a special election has to be held that will be paid for by the district.

Mr. Hempstead said he has no problem leaving it as is.

Mr. Menick said in the current Charter, if the mayor leaves, the Common Council president remains as Mayor until the next election.

Mr. Fairbairn asked how much a special election costs. Mr. McQuaid said it would cost about \$20,000.

Mr. Clark said he was inclined to leave the Charter as is. Mr. Fairbairn said he would advocate for leaving it as is.

Ms. Bennett asked what they were voting on. Mr. Fairbairn said they are not voting because there are no changes to the Charter.

B. Term of Office/Role of the Sheriff and Constables [1:27]

Mr. McQuaid provided background on the Sheriff position and said it was more ceremonial. He said Constables are needed for serving papers and their work is fee based. He said he believes they should keep the Constables. He said the seven Constables are at no cost to the City. He added that a lot of law offices call his office looking for a list of Constables.

Mr. Mednick said during the last Charter Revision it was concluded that the individual holding the position of Sheriff held it for a long time. He asked if it would be possible to terminate this position during the 2029 election.

Mr. Fairbairn suggested leaving the Constable position in the Charter and phasing out the Sheriff position with the 2029 election.

[1:36]

**** MR. MCQUAID MOVED TO HAVE MR. MEDNICK DRAFT LANGUAGE
PHASING OUT THE SHERIFF POSITION WITH THE 2029 ELECTION
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- Four Year
- Two Year

Mr. Fairbairn said they will revisit the four-year term at the next meeting.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Proposed Revisions

Mr. Mednick asked if the Commissioners reviewed his draft for 4-7. Mr. Fairbairn said it was exactly as discussed.

Mr. Dickens asked Mr. Hempstead and Mr. McQuaid if they recall any Mayors doing a state of the city address like the one that was done a few days ago. He said he had a conversation with Mr. Mednick asking him if he could put in the charter that the Mayor would be obligated to do a state of the city address. Mr. McQuaid said Mayor Rilling has done one over the last few years and they were open to the community. Mr. Clark said that does not rise to the level of being in the Charter. Mr. Fairbairn said he felt that could be left up to the individual. Mr. Mednick said New Haven has done this for years. Hartford just turned their state of the city into their budget presentation.

Mr. Dickens asked about adding language in the Charter where certain City employees would have to live in Norwalk. Mr. Mednick said that typically department heads fall into that category, but it would be difficult to get other employees to move. Mr. Dickens said this would not be related to Fire and Police personnel. Mr. Hempstead said this has been discussed over the years, but would limit the pool of candidates.

Mr. Levin said they discussed action item 7c and felt it would be appropriate to have a vote.

[1:49]

**** MR. LEVIN MOVED TO APPROVE 4-7 COMMON COUNCIL
COMPENSATION AS PRESENTED BY MR. MEDNICK
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Levin mentioned that the legislature is in session and is very busy. They are calling to allow municipalities to allow rank choice voting. He said they also discussed making modifications to the state statute that requires a referendum to increase legislative body compensation. He asked if Mr. Mednick or anyone had heard any follow up from Senator Duff. Mr. Mednick said he spoke with Mr. DeLong who will meet with his committee and legislative staff to look at it. He

said he was going to follow up with Senator Duff, but there is nothing new to report other than it is on the agenda. He said he would follow up with Mr. DeLong.

Mr. Mednick suggested inviting the Finance Director to the next meeting to talk about the budget. Mr. Hempstead asked Mr. Mednick if he could take what was discussed by the Common Council members and the Finance Director and highlight the areas in the charter that will address their concerns.

VI. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

[1:57]

A. Regular Meeting: January 21, 2025

The following corrections were made to the minutes:

Page 2: a strategy was written twice

Page 3: am should be an; Mr. Fairbairn should be Mr. Levin

Page 4: correct the spelling of Mr. Levin's name and non should be no

Page 5: Mr. Levin said this disenfranchises the 40% of people who voted

Page 7: Mr. Levin requested should be Mr. Fairbairn requested

Ordinance, statute and bill should be lower case throughout

Minority Representation should be Minority Party Representation throughout

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Fairbairn reported that another line was added to the Charter Revision website and everything that has been submitted to the Commission has been added. He said the website will continue to be updated.

Mr. Hempstead asked Mr. Mednick that based on the conversation with the Finance Director and the Common Council if he could identify in the City Charter those areas that would have to be addressed. Mr. Mednick said he will do that and also suggested for the next meeting having the Finance Director come before this Commission and talk about how the Charter works and how the budget works and what the process is all about. He said he can get other speakers if they want to delve into it.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services