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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](mailto: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  
VIA TELECONFERENCE  
MARCH 4, 2025**

ATTENDANCE: Taylor Fairbairn, Chair; Douglas Hempstead, Vice Chair; Ed Camacho, James Clark; John Levin; Richard McQuaid; Tanya Rhodes Small; Jo Bennett (6:55 p.m.)

OTHERS: Steven Mednick, Commission Counsel

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

## **II. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Fairbairn called the Roll as indicated above.

## **III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** [1:24]

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

Ms. Lisa Brinton said she was looking forward to seeing the scenarios for the majority party representation. She expressed her thanks for the effort being made to bring fair representation to the City. She suggested having a shorter time frame for approving the budget and consolidating some of the administrative departments with the Board of Education. Ms. Brinton said it would be nice if the referendum process was more clearly articulated in the Charter. She added that she would not want to lower the threshold.

## **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

[4:10]

Mr. Mednick reviewed the timeline and calendar, noting they have eight meetings left; one will have to be a public hearing. After tonight's meeting, they will need to address outstanding finance issues. He said he talked to the Common Council President about Common Council leadership and/or members attending the next meeting to discuss the CFO's proposal. He suggested at that meeting they look at the latest version of the grid to see if anything needs to be addressed during the month of April as they begin to move toward conclusion.

Mr. Mednick addressed chapters 13 & 14 in the Charter that deal with historical provisions. He noted that departments are looking at those sections and the intention of the last Charter Revision was to isolate those historical provisions. The intent would be to recommend repeal of those provisions or integrate them into the body of the Charter in the appropriate place.

### **A. Minority Party Representation [13:35]**

Mr. Fairbairn explained that the three scenarios have been discussed. The first keeps the five districts with 10 people elected from the districts and five people at large; a portion of which would be the minority party. The second scenario would eliminate the at large positions and

would have three representatives from each district where they may not have more than two representatives from the same party. The third scenario would be to have 15 mini districts.

Mr. Hempstead suggested eliminating scenario three because the City just completed the redistricting and creating 15 council districts creates a bigger challenge.

Mr. Mednick said scenarios two and three would require some degree of reapportionment and suggested having alternatives ready for the 2027 election would be burdensome. He said scenario two is the wait for the effect of those districts to take place after the census. He said there is an obligation for a constitutional reapportionment in time for the 2033 election. Mr. Mednick suggested holding off on the effect of any district changes.

Ms. Bennett joined the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

Mr. McQuaid said the most workable plan is scenario two.

A discussion took place over the timing of redistricting and the census.

Mr. McQuaid said that said that due to early voting they may see a decrease in the number of people voting at specific locations.

[27:55]

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADOPT SCENARIO TWO TO TAKE EFFECT IN THE 2027 ELECTION**

Mr. Hempstead asked if they were addressing the Board of Education at the same time. Mr. Mednick said he was not asked to do that, but could look at the Board of Education.

Mr. Camacho said scenario two was antidemocratic and gave examples of the party breakdown of the Common Council and Board of Education prior to 2016. He said he would vote in opposition to this motion because it was undemocratic and will not pass the Common Council.

Mr. Hempstead said the rules are not made statewide to give the unaffiliated voter the same opportunity as someone in a majority party. He added that Norwalk is one of two communities in Connecticut that does not have minority party roles. Mr. Camacho said it was undemocratic to take a vote away from someone.

Mr. McQuaid suggested moving minority party representation, along with compensation and four year terms to the back burner for the next cycle and then go concentrate on the budget and other things on the agenda.

City of Norwalk  
Charter Revision Commission  
Regular Meeting  
Via Teleconference  
March 4, 2025  
Page 3

Mr. Levin said he did not see scenario two as a good way to fix the problem. He added that it would be a mistake to eliminate at large Common Council seats.

**\*\* MOTION FAILED WITH ONE (1) VOTE IN FAVOR AND SIX (6) IN OPPOSITION (MR. FAIRBAIRN; MR. LEVIN; MR. CAMACHO; MS. RHODES SMALL; MR. CLARK AND MS. BENNETT) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. MCQUAID)**

[43:26]

**\*\* MR. CAMACHO MOVED TO TABLE THE DISCUSSION ON THE MINORITY PARTY REPRESENTATION**

Mr. McQuaid suggested tabling term limits, four year terms and compensation. Mr. Camacho said that with respect to compensation, the only change they discussed was to include some language “in accordance with law”. Mr. Mednick said this would maintain the baseline and allow for increases in accordance with law. He said the Commission approved retaining the current level of compensation and allowing for increases in accordance with the law.

A discussion took place regarding the four year term and how it would be perceived since the current Mayor was not running again. It was noted that there was opposition to a four year Mayoral term if there were two year Common Council terms. Mr. Clark suggested that since the four year term would not be connected to a particular candidate it could have a positive response across the board. He said a two year cycle puts a lot of stress on budgets and long term plans. He said terms would have to be staggered if they wanted four year terms for the Mayor and Common Council.

Mr. Camacho said he did not think a lot of people would sign up for a four year term at \$60.00 a month.

Mr. Fairbairn suggested revisiting this matter at a later date. Mr. Mednick explained that if they table this, it would still be on the table and would need to come back. If they invite leadership from the Common Council to discuss budget issues next week, they may want to use that opportunity to discuss the four year term issue.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED WITH SEVEN (7) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. BENNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. CLARK; MR. FAIRBAIRN; MR. LEVIN; MR. MCQUAID AND MS. RHODES SMALL) AND ONE (1) VOTE IN OPPOSITION (MR. HEMPSTEAD)**

Mr. Mednick read the action that was taken regarding Common Council compensation on January 21, 2025. He explained that any increase would have to be done in accordance with law. Right now the law would be approval in the budget, plus a referendum to approve it. If the law at the state level changes, it could be treated like any other elements of compensation.

[59:20]

**\*\* MR. MCQUAID MOVED TO TABLE THE FOUR YEAR TERM  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

#### B. Referendum Procedure (Section 4-10)

Mr. Levin reviewed proposal that was circulated last week. He gave an overview of section 4-10 of the charter that provides the procedure for matters that can be subject to a referendum. He described the process for requesting a petition.

Mr. Levon proposed reducing 8%; to 5% reducing the electors from five to four and increasing the fee from \$25.00 to \$200.00. In addition he proposed increasing the number of days required to gather petition signatures from 25 to 45 days. He said his goal was to help improve the City government and help to make the process more democratic. He said citizen referendums are rare but this sends a message to voters that the government is responsive to their needs.

In his comments, Mr. Levin mentioned that New Haven requires 1.5% . In response to Mr. Camacho's question, Mr. Mednick said in his political adulthood, he could not think of a referendum being held in the City of New Haven.

Mr. Camacho suggested if people were not happy with what is being done, they could vote or run for office. He said when an referendum occurs it basically stops city government because they have to prepare for an election.

Mr. Clark said he had no problem going from 8% to 5% or with increasing the fee and number of days, but did not understand why Mr. Levin was proposing going from five to four electors. He said he would leave it. He added that looking at this realistically, he could see why it would be better not to do this at this time.

Mr. McQuaid commented that he felt they would be running out of election days, with early voting and absentee ballots, voting and primaries everything else going on. He said he did not know if they could fit this into the schedule.

Mr. Hempstead said there was a referendum when they split Planning and Zoning; it passed, but did not meet the percentage of registered votes so the Ordinance stayed as is.

Mr. Hempstead said he believed the citizens have a right to petition government. He said the capital and operating budgets are subject to referendum and if they put in the timeline for the petitions, they could end the fiscal year without an operating budget. Mr. Levin said that under section 4-11, the referendum goes into the next municipal election. He said the possibility of a referendum promotes public trust in the government.

Mr. Fairbairn explained that if someone is upset about an ordinance, they can run a candidate against that person that supported it and vote them out.

Mr. Levin said an ordinance is decided by the full Common Council.

Mr. Camacho said that in an earlier discussion they talked about a town where they raised the issue of doing away with some language having to do with term limits and that person was voted out of office along with the full common council.

Mr. Mednick explained that in the event of a referendum, the Common Council determines the date of the referendum. He said they are all special elections and are not part of the general election.

[1:25:05]

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO TABLE THE DISCUSSION ON THE  
REFERENDUM PROCEDURE (SECTION 4-10)**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

C. General Fund Process [1:25:33]

Mr. Mednick said if anything significant comes up as he puts together the CFO's comments he can note the concerns of the members of the Commission. Mr. Fairbairn said there were some proposals presented by the CFO to the operating and capital budget calendars. He said the discussion will continue when they meet with the members of the Common Council. He asked if anyone had any comments on the proposed changes that the CFO presented at the last meeting. Mr. Hempstead went down the list of proposals for the capital and operating budgets.

- Mayoral authority
- BET functions
- Role of BOE in initial joint public hearings
- Council oversight and role

City of Norwalk  
Charter Revision Commission  
Regular Meeting  
Via Teleconference  
March 4, 2025  
Page 6

- Budget schedule alignment
- Public hearings and interactions
- Update and refine language

## V. DISCUSSION

### VI. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES [1:34:27]

A. Regular Meeting: February 18, 2025

The following correction was made to the minutes:

Correct the spelling of Mr. Mednick's name.

**\*\* MR. CLARK MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS CORRECTED  
\*\* MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. MCQUAID)**

### VII. ADJOURNMENT [1:35:35]

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

There was no further discussion, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services