

PUBLIC HEARING – AD-HOC ADVISORY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION – WESTERLY LIBRARY
SATURDAY – MAY 14, 2016 – 9:00 A.M.

1. 9:08 A.M. CALL TO ORDER

Present: Lawrence Cioppa, Chair
Chris Lawlor, Filer
James Angelo
Richard Dudley
Christian Lund
Nina Rossomando
Paula Ruisi
Stephen Turano

Absent: John Formica

Also Present: Benjamin Delaney, Recording Secretary

2. 9:08 A.M. PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Cioppa summarized what a charter was and what revisions the Commission was recommending to-date. He noted meeting minutes were now available on the Town's website in addition to audio recordings of the meetings.

Linda Bongiolatti thanked the Commission for its time and effort and requested clarification on the recommended revision for **staggered** Town Council terms.

Mr. Cioppa stated all councilors would serve for a four year term after phasing in a system through a temporary portion of the charter.

Ms. Bongiolatti stated her support for the revision and questioned if the Code of Ethics would establish an Ethics Commission.

Mr. Cioppa stated the Commission was only recommending an ethics statement.

Ms. Bongiolatti stated her support and suggested membership on the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Review should be put to election. She noted moving from appointed to elected membership may make the boards less political if such change was allowed under state law.

Jack Armstrong thanked the Commission for its time and effort. He noted his service on past commissions and stated many of the Commission's revisions would be beneficial. He cautioned the Commission not to be over-reactive to the past and to not revise the charter so much it may restrict the ability of elected officials to conduct their work.

Ms. Rossomando questioned if Mr. Armstrong had any specific concerns.

Mr. Armstrong noted his concern the initiative for referendum may be overreaching.

Mr. Cioppa recommended Mr. Armstrong review the minutes and stated he believed the recommended revision would not be restrictive.

Charles Marsh thanked the Commission for its time and effort and stated his concern regarding self-serving biases. He stated quarries operating in town were producing carcinogens and operated as heavy industry. He suggested a Director and Department of Environmental Safety be established to protect the local environment through existing laws and noted a bill supported by local state legislators.

Robert Lombardo thanked the Commission for its time and effort and stated his support for the Commission's revisions regarding Town Council terms and the recalling of officials due to local conditions. He noted the difficulty of filing ethics violations and supported an initiative for referendum. He recommended the Town Manager designate the Director of Public Safety to be an individual located closely to town. He noted the adoption of the Bill of Rights was a reaction to the past. He noted his concern regarding the inclusion of gender-specific pronouns.

Mr. Cioppa confirmed the Commission would be addressing the use of gender-specific pronouns.

Attorney Lombardo summarized his personal career and what led him to be involved. He stated several concerns regarding violations of the charter, use of taxes for legal expenses regarding ethics violations and pensions, and qualifications for the Finance Director.

Mr. Cioppa recommended Mr. Lombardo bring his concerns to the attention of the Town Council.

Mr. Lombardo restated his support for staggered terms and noted additional concerns regarding the ignoring of qualification requirements for positions, a conflict of interest that the Town Solicitor report to the Town Council and Town Manager, absence of a requirement for the Town Manager to be a town resident, absence of checks and balances and past changes to qualification requirements for the Finance Director. He stated a need for more public participation and code enforcement staff.

Motion by Mr. Lawlor, Seconded by Mr. Dudley, for a five minutes recess. (Voted unanimously)

The hearing went into recess at 10:08 a.m. and reconvened at 10:13 a.m.
(Mr. Lund reentered)

Jean Gagnier, noted he was speaking as a private citizen and thanked the Commission for its time and effort. He stated any ordinance(s) proposed by a minimum of two councilors was required to be put on a workshop agenda and any petitions received would also invariably be put on a workshop agenda. He suggested the initiative for referendum be a third mechanism available if the two existing did not prove adequate. He stated it was incumbent upon elected officials to be aware of state ethics and requested the Commission to consider eliminating the discretion of the Town Council to reimburse government officials for legal costs regarding ethics violations.

Gina Fuller noted she was a member of the School Committee and stated her agreement with previous comments supporting an inclusion of an ethics statement in the charter, supporting taxpayers should not pay legal fees for an official who demonstrated a willful ethics violation and supporting changes to Town Council terms. She questioned if establishing a Department of Public Health and Safety

would correct local problems. She stated the non-residence of the Town Manager was an asset to the town and her agreement the Finance Department's organization violated the Charter. She stated she believed a consolidated department was able to function and the Finance Director should report to the Town Council and the Town Manager. She thanked the Commission for its time and effort and recommended the Recreation Board be removed from the charter due to its authority in relation to the Recreation Director. She cautioned the number of questions on the ballot should be kept low.

Sally Lawlor noted citizens often went before the Town Council regarding issues related to quality of life. She cited several examples and stated citizens needed an avenue to resolve such issues.

Mr. Marsh stated there was a lack of focus on the general public due to self-serving biases and questioned if the Recreation Board should be established by charter if a Board of Safety was not. He offered to finalize a diagram of the local government organization and noted a comment received from a citizen to consider the protection of homeland security as a part of public safety.
(Mr. Angelo exited)

The Commission broke out into informal discussion.
(Mr. Angelo reentered)

3. 11:00 A.M. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ms. Rossomando, Seconded by Mr. Lawlor, to adjourn. (Voted unanimously)

Minutes for the May 14, 2016 public hearing submitted by:



Benjamin Delaney