

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Special Meeting Minutes - Monday, June 1, 2020

Via teleconference

7:00 P.M.

The June 1, 2020 special meeting of the Charter Revision Commission was called to order at 7:05 PM.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Gwen Marrion, Adam Teller, Richard Hayes, Jay Brudz, and John Toomey.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Eleanor Georges and Jim Aldrich.

OTHERS PRESENT: Board of Education members Chris Davey, Andrew Broneil, and Susan Pike, Commission Clerk Michael Stankov, and Administrative Officer Joshua Kelly

ITEM 2: Discussion with members of the Bolton Board of Education regarding possible revisions to the town charter

G. Marrion stated that the Charter Revision commission has been considering a number of revisions to the town's charter, and hoped that the members of the BoE present today might be able to share their thoughts concerning the Board of Finance and the budgeting process in town. G. Marrion asked first about how many budget cycles each of the Board of Education (BoE) members present had been through. C. Davey stated he has experienced 5, A. Broneil 5, and S. Pike 2.

G. Marrion next asked about how each BoE member felt about the process of budgeting in their experience. A. Broneil stated that as he recalled, the Board of Finance (BoF) would normally cut the budget submitted by the BoE, that the BoE budget was an accurate estimate of expenditures and needs for the school system, and that the BoE was able to absorb the cuts even though they disagreed with them. C. Davey echoed many of these sentiments, also saying that he felt that the BoF budget cuts were often without logic or dismissive of the work that the BoE does, and that the individuals who cut budgets were not adequately informed of the actual operations of the schools.

S. Pike stated that she wished that the BoE's original budget would be able to go to the town uncut by the BoF such that the town's populace could vote on the budget the BoE felt was appropriate. A. Broneil stated that he has felt that many members of the BoF aren't particularly informed about the needs of the BoE, but that those BoF members who attend BoE meetings are often much better informed.

G. Marrion asked next about whether the perception held by the BoE members, that the BoF makes somewhat arbitrary cuts, also holds true for the budgets of the Board of Selectmen (Bos). Both A. Broneil and C. Davey stated that although they didn't know everything about the manner in which the BoF has historically cut the BoS budget, they thought that the behavior of arbitrary cuts was consistent across both Boards.

G. Marrion next posed the question to the BoE members regarding whether or not they would support the elimination of the BoF. C. Davey stated that he has historically supported the elimination of the BoF in the past, but is not so sure at the moment. Although the elimination of the BoF would potentially give the BoE more time to budget and thus more time to gather information and create a more accurate budget, he also sees the BoF as holding a position of being a "neutral body" to arbitrate between the Town and the Schools. Removing the BoF would necessitate the creation of some new body to replace it, and C. Davey worried that factionalism on that replacement body might make it difficult to appropriately allocate funds between the Town and the Schools.

A. Broneil generally agreed with C. Davey's statements, and stated that he is wary of the elimination of the BoF because it would create a situation where two groups are looking for money, but one has more power in determining what budget goes to referendum. This inequality of power between the BoS and BoE could be deeply problematic if members of all of the Boards were not working together.

S. Pike stated that the BoF exists for an important reason, and that examples abound as to the importance of its role as arbiter between the Town and Schools in other towns. However, she also expressed the sentiment that the budgeting process can be deeply frustrating as it exists now, despite its importance.

J. Toomey stated that in his view, the BoF has never truly been neutral, and that the idealized role of the body as a neutral arbiter is fantasy. In his experience on the BoF, there is very little communication and attendance by BoF members at relevant budget meetings for the BoE and BoS, and that the BoF is largely operating by itself, in the dark, and that this has resulted in 3-4 referendums each year for many years. Only in recent years, when individuals on the BoF have understood and attended more BoE meetings, has the number of referendums come down. J. Toomey asked the BoE members what they thought the Checks and Balances that should be exercised by the BoF should be, and how changes to the Board might let it exercise these checks more effectively..

S. Pike stated that she felt that the most important role of the BoF is that it ensures that all of the power to present a budget to the town referendum isn't held by the BoS. A. Broneil stated that ultimately, the referendum is the check on the powers of the various Boards, and that it is more important than the powers of the BoF. Despite this, when the BoF makes cuts to the budgets that are presented to it, it should hypothetically not favor the town or the schools, even though in practice it may not always do so. C. Davey largely agreed with A. Broneil's viewpoint.

A. Teller asked the BoE members if the BoF might be an effective body for debate and holding public hearings regarding the budget, and that if the power of the BoF to cut the BoE budget was

taken away and the BoE budget were able to go directly to the town referendum instead, if they would find that arrangement more effective. S. Pike largely agreed that such a situation would be beneficial to the BoE.

C. Davey stated that A. Teller's idea was similar to an idea that he had thought about, wherein in lieu of a BoF, there was a board that contained members of the BoE, BoS, and some individuals who were not involved with either body, who would review budgets and negotiate cuts. Such a body would be able to effectively hash out budgeting problems and have direct input from informed members of both the BoS and BoE.

A. Teller asked C. Davey if such a body should contain elected individuals or some appointed individuals – in particular whether or not experts in finance or budgeting should be invited to sit on such a board. S. Pike stated that she was not generally in favor of appointed individuals sitting on such a hypothetical body, and C. Davey stated that while there was merit in having experts on such a board, it should certainly not be composed mostly of such individuals.

J. Brudz asked whether or not the BoE members felt that the reason the BoE budget seemed to be cut more aggressively than the BoS budget was because of the minimum budget requirement for the school systems. S. Pike and A. Broneil stated that they did not see the minimum budget requirement as being the primary driving force behind BoF cuts to the BoE budget in the past. C. Davey concurred - though he did note that it was possible that such requirements concerning the BoE budget could affect the decision making of BoF, he did not think that such a situation had occurred.

J. Brudz next stated that the current language in Bolton's Charter states that if a budget is rejected at referendum and is returned to the BoF, the BoF can only decrease the budget and not increase it. In the view of the BoE, would giving the BoF the power to increase a budget that failed at referendum be a good idea?

S. Pike, A. Broneil and C. Davey all noted that altering the language of the charter to allow the BoF to raise a failed budget certainly wouldn't be a bad thing, but that in their experience the reason that budgets fail is never because they're too low – normally citizens simply don't want to pay taxes and will vote against budgets that they view as being high, regardless of the financial realities of the situation.

R. Hayes asked about the feelings of the members of the BoE who were not present at the meeting. C. Davey noted that there was not notable support for the elimination of the BoF among the members of the BoE, and A. Broneil stated that several members of the BoE who were not in attendance were new to the Board and thus likely hadn't had time to formulate deep opinions on such a matter.

R. Hayes next asked about the fact that the members of the BoE had simultaneously stated that the BoF had unfairly cut their budgets and that they did not support the elimination of the BoF. R. Hayes asked for clarification on this fact – did the BoE members present feel that keeping the BoF is better than giving more budgeting power to the BoS because it is the "Devil you know"? S. Pike, A. Broneil, and C. Davey all stated that it would be impossible to speak to such a

situation at present without more information about the specific form a new budgeting body might take, but admitted that the BoF is a “known unknown” in the budgeting process that can be accounted for, as opposed to the truly “unknown unknown” of the new board.

R. Hayes concluded his questions with asking about feelings towards hypothetically combining the finance offices for the town and the school district in order to ease some of the complications of the budget process. C. Davey and A. Broneil both stated that it would depend on the specifics of such a combination and ensuring that the combined finance department could work closely with the Superintendent of Schools would be very important.

G. Marrion thanked the BoE members for attending and sharing their thoughts, and closed the special meeting at 8:04.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Stankov', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Michael Stankov, Charter Revision Commission Clerk

See minutes of subsequent meetings for approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.

DRAFT