

BOLTON CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting and Public Hearing

Thursday, February 4, 2021

Via teleconference

7:00 P.M.

Phone: 1-929-205-6099

Meeting ID: 850 8630 3456

The February 4, 2021 meeting of the Charter Revision Commission was called to order at 7:02 PM.

1. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Gwen Marrion, Vice Chair Eleanor Georges, Adam Teller, Richard Hayes, Jay Brudz, Jim Aldrich, and John Toomey.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Board Clerk Michael Stankov, Various members of the public

2. DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE DECISION REGARDING NEXT STEPS IN CHARTER REVIEW PROCESS

J. Brudz clarified that individuals at the meeting that wish to speak and have called in via phone can raise their hand to indicate their desire to speak by pressing *9. A. Teller noted that those speaking should begin their comments with their name, and M. Stankov noted that the individuals speaking should also state their address.

3. PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING DRAFT REPORT TO THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN.

G. Marrion opened the hearing at 7:15 by introducing the commission and noting the hard, long work that they have put in over the last year. She continued by explaining the process of the review, the many individuals that were consulted during the charter revision process, and outlined the likely path the commission would follow after public comment was heard at this meeting.

Cheryl Udin, of 30 Rokiene drive, spoke first on the topic of gender neutrality. C. Udin was uncertain about why selectman was being kept as the only gender specific term in the constitution. She noted that a change to “selectmember”, “board member” or “selectperson” would work well and be gender neutral. C. Udin also asked if changing some boards to be appointed would affect minority representation, and she last asked if the two budgets for the town and the school would be voted on separately. G. Marrion noted that the two budgets are not intended to be voted on separately, and that minority representation is guaranteed in the CT Statutes.

B. Morra, Selectman, asked about the restructure of the BoF – specifically, what precisely is being recommended to be done with the CAPA commission if the BoF is turned into a FC. J. Aldrich responded by noting that such a thing had not yet been decided but was likely. B. Morra asked if the FC recommends the mill rate, and A. Teller noted that the FC would set the mill rate, decide upon the final budget that goes to referendum, and become the CAPA commission.

Bob Neil, of 195 West Street, spoke in favor of increasing the size of the BoS and having a 4-year term for Selectmen. He spoke in favor of changing the name of the BoS to the Town Council to ease the transition away from gendered language.

Morris Silverstein, of 16 Mt Sumner Drive, spoke about how this charter revision would allow too much control in the hands of too few people, and does not agree with the elimination of the BoF. In his view, M. Silverstein believed that it is necessary for a separate group of people who are not on the BoS or BoE to examine the budget, and that eliminating the BoF would be reducing transparency and involvement with government by too much for too many people.

Marty Georges, of 19 Shoddy Mill Road, spoke about his concern regarding section 8.5 C1, which changes the word “reduce” to “revise”. In his view, while changing this language makes it more neutral, it does not encourage the town budgeting process to converge on an answer because of the lack of implied directionality. Opening up the door to having the budget go up could unduly draw out the budgeting process.

William Roddy, of 31 Shoddy Mill Road, asked about the composition of the 7-member Finance Commision, and why the BoS essentially gets 4 members while the BoE gets 3. On the topic of extending the duration of BoS member terms, W. Roddy suggested that a compensation review board be implemented in order to ensure that town dollars were being well spent. W. Roddy also spoke to his concern of allowing the budget to increase with successive budget revisions, and whether it would be better to hold off on the charter revision until after the pandemic. G. Marrion clarified that the members of the FC would be 3 BoS, 2 BoE, and 2 appointed, and that the time frame for the operation of the Charter Revision Commission is constrained by CT State Statute.

Joe Refo, of 84 Lumbis Road, spoke about how the issue of eliminating the BoF comes from allowing those that desire to spend money to hold the purse strings. J. Refo asked if it would be possible for the appointed members of the proposed FC to be elected independently, and last asked if these revisions would be voted on all or nothing. G. Marrion clarified that the manner in which the proposed changes would be voted on was not yet decided.

Monita Hebrid, of 11 Deer Run Road, asked about the issue of whether individuals on the grand list within 1000 dollars or more of town property would be allowed to vote on the budget referendum, noting that towns such as Manchester and Hartford do not allow individuals that own property but are not residents to vote. M. Hebrid spoke against this, stating that residency is critical to understanding the way tax dollars in town are spent. She also spoke against defaulting to a coin toss for tied municipal elections, arguing that such a change is weakening local democracy.

William Anderson, of 77 French Road, spoke in favor of making the Planning and Zoning commission an appointed board, of not allowing the runner up for First Selectman to automatically take a seat among the selectmen if they have more votes than another member of the selectmen, and the elimination of the Economic Development Commission.

Pete Bradly, of 22 Norma's Way, spoke against the elimination of the BoF, as the goal of reducing redundant work may not be better than the alternative of concentrating too much power to decide financing in the hands of those who spend money. He noted that the appointed members of the FC would not be truly independent votes, and that the supposition that they would be leaves the BoS in firm control of the BoE budget over time. He also spoke in favor of changing the language of budget referendum changes to "revise" from "reduce".

Emily Bradly, of 12 Norma's Way, was particularly concerned with the elimination of the BoF, arguing that the entity currently exists as an impartial body that is needed for the budgeting process. While there are things that can be done to reduce complexity and redundancy, such changes do not need to come at the death of the BoF. If it were to be eliminated, the members should be elected.

Chris Davey, of 21 Maxwell Drive, argued that retaining the words "selectman" and "selectmen" is problematic for a variety of reasons and should be made gender neutral in revisions. C. Davey supported the expansion of the BoS to 7 members and generally supported the change of the BoF into the finance commission, though he had concerns about the balancing of members being weighted too heavily towards the BoS. C. Davey noted that he was disappointed with the decision to not allow non-electors or non-citizens to hold appointed or elected positions. He also noted that the lack of an indication of why individuals vote a budget down is likely what is causing the issue with "revising" or "reducing" the budget, and that such a change would be good for the budget process. He lastly spoke in favor of the commitment to transparency that the CRC displayed in recommending that all meeting materials and recordings of the minutes should be made available to the public online whenever feasible.

Sandra Pierog, of 37 Brandy Street, First Selectman, spoke against allowing the First Selectman to serve on the Fire Department or emergency services. She next spoke about the fact that there is currently no language pertaining to who should chair the new FC, which she generally supports. S. Pierog next spoke against reducing the town expenditures that require a town meeting to be called for approval, noting a series of road repairs that had to be completed in the past year which were routine expenditures that would have triggered a town meeting under the new proposed values. In her view, these values should be doubled or more to allow the BoS to keep operations going without unnecessary expenditures.

Pam Sawyer, of 95 South Hill Road, spoke in favor of adding paper ballots options to all votes in town hall, and also spoke to the idea of changing the title of "Board of Selectmen" to "Selectboard". P. Sawyer next asked about the terms for all of the Boards and whether they would be staggered. She next noted the imbalance in the FC favoring the BoE and recommended a 9 member panel featuring 3 members of the BoS, 3 from the BoE, and 3 members elected at large. Commissioner A. Teller noted that the terms would be staggered, and that the BoS is the ultimate governing body in town and that failures of the budgeting process should be laid

squarely at their feet. In his view, allowing the BoS more control in the budgeting process lays accountability at their feet properly, and they can be held accountable for failings in the town's budgeting process via the ballot box, wherein those who are dissatisfied with town spending can vote to remove a fiscally irresponsible government. A. Teller also spoke about the reasoning behind changing the language from "reduce" to "revise", and that those individuals who want to increase the budget in order to gain more services for the town have no voice to do so at present.

Kristen Gourley, of 10 Deer Run Road, spoke about the need of the BoF to be the Town's "Financial Conscience", and that allowing members of either the BoE or BoS to serve on this body would create a conflict of interest. If revisions were to be made to the BoF, in K. Gourley's view no more than 2 individuals should be on that body from either the BoE or BoS, with the remaining 3 members being elected by the public. She next spoke against allowing appointees to serve on the FC, as such an individual should be directly responsible to the voters.

C. Davey, of 21 Maxwell Drive, spoke again to ask if the FC, in whatever iteration it takes, must satisfy minority representation requirements, and if individuals would have to be appointed from particular parties would it be possible to dictate the division of representation for the various boards appointing individuals to the FC? G. Marrion noted that the CRC would have to rethink representation.

Richard Treat, of 8 Lyman Road, spoke against increasing the number of appointments in town, and spoke against not allowing the runner up for First Selectman to automatically take a seat among the selectmen if they have more votes than another member of the selectmen. He also noted the complexity of the issues being presented and hoped that the voters would have the ability to choose some of, but not all of, the ideas being presented here when voting on the ballot.

Trish Brudz, of 25 Hannover farm road, voiced concerns that making the BoF non-elected takes away the ability of voters to choose individuals who are qualified to make financial decisions for the board. T. Brudz also noted that the concentration of power in fewer hands and elimination of elected positions in favor of appointed positions was not something that she preferred.

J. Brudz, Commissioner, of 25 Hannover farm road, spoke in favor of changing the wording regarding budget changes to "revise" from "reduce", as he feels that it builds inherent bias into the charter. As budgets are supposed to be built on compromise, building in this inherent bias is problematic in his opinion, which is why he voted for such a change.

J. Aldrich, Commissioner, of 35 Hannover farm road, spoke about how many of the issues that had been discussed tonight should likely be separate questions on the ballot due to the many diverse opinions on them. J. Aldrich also noted that some changes being suggested to the charter, such as increasing the size and terms of the BoS are being made because it is difficult to find individuals to regularly run for office, and individuals should be given a chance to learn the office once they are elected to it.

A. Teller noted the large involvement of over 45 individuals at the meeting, and the number of individuals that commented about the desire for directly elected individuals on the Finance Commission. A. Teller noted that he has taken away the fact that many individuals want direct

election of some individuals to the finance commission and that the commission may need to consider rebalancing the exact composition and manner of election for this board.

J. Toomey, Commissioner, noted that he supported renaming the BoS to a “Town council” with no major change in function that would eliminate the inherent gendering of the name “Board of Selectmen”. He also spoke at length about how there has often been a lack of coordination between the BoF, the BoE, and the BoS in the past, and how the newly envisioned FC would force those bodies into more direct contact earlier in the budgeting process, which would smooth the process of budgeting in future years.

E. Georges, Commissioner, agreed strongly with A. Teller and J. Toomey’s comments that the proposed reform of the FC is intended to increase transparency and ease the budgeting process without taking away the safeguards of the referendum process or the input of outside voices. The FC model being proposed is a system that was created with the input of many individuals with different perspectives on the budgeting process, and that the intention of the at-large members in the FC model is to ensure that voices from outside the BoS and BoE are heard.

R. Hayes, Commissioner, noted that while many individuals are anxious about the potential reduction of the School budget, there are CT State Statutes that prevent reducing the school budget below certain thresholds, which ensures a certain level of financial commitment from the town. R. Hayes also spoke in favor of increasing the number of appointed boards from a perspective of ensuring that town residents who are not members of political parties can serve the town. R. Hayes lastly remarked on the fact that the commission had not considered the subject of term limits very much in their discussions and would have to do so in their following meetings.

Rob Galloway, of 45 Castle Rock road, spoke in favor of reforming the board of finance and wondered if the two budgets for the school and the town could be voted on separately. R. Galloway also spoke against S. Pierog’s request to increase the dollar value expenditure that required a town meeting to be called.

MOTION MADE by J. Brudz, seconded A. Teller, to close the public hearing.

DISCUSSION: None

VOTING IN FAVOR: G. Marrion, J. Brudz, J. Aldrich, A. Teller, J. Toomey, R. Hayes, and E. Georges.

VOTING AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

MOTION MADE by A. Teller, seconded by J. Brudz to close the meeting.

DISCUSSION: None

VOTING IN FAVOR: G. Marrion, J. Brudz, J. Aldrich, A. Teller, J. Toomey, R. Hayes, and E. Georges.

VOTING AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:29.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Stankov, Charter Revision Commission Board Clerk

Please see future minutes for revisions and corrections to these minutes.