

**Minutes of the Public Hearing of the
Charter Revision Commission
April 8, 2009**

Present: Chairman Ernie Petkovich, Eric Remington, John P. Murphy, Elaine O'Brien, Douglas Viets and Rodney Dillman. **Absent:** Bobbie Kling, Thomas J. Sheridan, Jr.

Mr. Petkovich opened the public hearing at 7:32 p.m. in the Suffield Senior Center. He called upon the recording secretary Chris Koren to read the legal notice published in the Journal Inquirer newspaper.

Mr. Petkovich presented a handout and power point presentation on the Commission's draft report. He went over the 6 Charges given to the Commission by the Board of Selectmen on January 17, 2008. The Commission held its first public hearing on March 11, 2008. He reviewed in detail the work the Commission has done and also reviewed the steps in the Charter Revision process.

Mr. Petkovich discussed the recommended Charter changes which would include a Town Administrator and outlined the Administrator's responsibilities. The Town Administrator would work under the direction of the First Selectman. He described the benefits of having a professional with experience managing the day-to-day operations of the Town. There were concerns, however, that under this recommendation, there were not enough checks and balances written into the Charter. Another concern was that the Town Administrator's authority is not strong enough.

He also went over other recommendations, the technical corrections and other suggested changes that do not require a Charter change. (See attached draft report).

Mr. Petkovich then opened the hearing to the public in attendance for their comment and questions. **Public Present:** Bill Leahey, Tom Bellmore, Warren Packard, Thea Coburn, Sami Mehmed. Also reporters from the J.I., Southwick/Suffield, and Reminder Press.

Sami Mehmed of 10 Dara Lane asked what salary range would be offered to the Town Administrator, and who would hire this person?

Mr. Petkovich answered that the Town Administrator's salary would be \$100,000 to \$120,000 and benefits. The hiring would fall under the Board of Selectmen and the Contract for employment would be negotiated upon hiring. The Board of Finance would determine the actual salary.

Thea Coburn, 511 North Main Street asked what the First Selectman's salary was, and if any other Town in Connecticut has this type of structure for government. She was concerned that the Town Administrator's salary being higher than the First Selectman and if this would cause a problem with the two people working together.

The First Selectman's salary is \$77,625.00. Also, the Town of Columbia has the type of government as what is being proposed, except that their First Selectman is part time.

Sami Mehmed felt that the thought by hiring a Town Administrator you get longevity, but it is just an assumption. He will also have a 1 year learning curve. Also the person may not stay more than 2-3 years. He also asked if the Town Administrator would be in charge of all Boards and Commissions.

Warren Packard of 2 Oxford Drive. He thanked the Commission for dedicating their time and they are a real service to the town as volunteers are getting harder to find. However, he faulted the Commission's procedure and was disappointed with the process as it relates to the Town Administrator because there are two people on the Commission who have very clear conflicts of interest regarding the Town Administrator issue. They should have recused themselves from any discussion and vote on the T.A. position, or the definition of the duties of the First Selectman. He said that the job description for the Town Administrator started as a strong position supervising everyone. Now it describes someone who gets to supervise everyone, except almost all the employees of the town. He has no authority over elected personnel, fire, police and board of education employees which are the biggest part of the budget. Who does that leave? About 15 non-union employees? He felt the position is not strong and valid position at all. It defines a high paid assistant to the First Selectman. It does not define an independent, professional, trained Administrator. The end product from the Commission is a weak position that won't attract an attractive candidate from the outside world. People will look at the cost involved and ask what are we paying for? Therefore, he felt it wasn't worth dealing with at this point.

There being no further comments from the public, Mr. Petkovich closed the public hearing at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Petkovich then called to order the Special Meeting of the Charter Revision Commission at 8:35 p.m. He asked the members if there was anything from the public hearing that significantly changed their thinking on any matter. Mr. Murphy said there will be a problem trying to sell the two full time positions and two salaries. Mr. Dillman said the Board of Selectmen can take all or any part of the report, and modify it. If the Board of Selectmen feels the First Selectman should be a part time position, they can eliminate the full time language.

Mr. Viets commented on the question of a conflict of interest of two members on the Commission. He felt there isn't any. Each individual on the Commission has brought a unique perspective to the Commission and supports each member of the Commission. If anyone wants to challenge this, he will openly defend that there was no conflict of interest. However, he agreed that the recommendations the Commission has made needs more work, but wants to wait and see how the Board of Selectmen will react. If the Selectmen feel there is no support on these recommendations, then the Charter

Commission will have to do some revamping, or decide that we are just going to drop this issue entirely.

Mr. Murphy said the salary of \$125,000 for the Town Administrator is going to raise concerns. Mr. Viets said he wouldn't put a dollar amount on the position. The Board of Finance has the ultimate control of this. Mr. Murphy said this is a stepping stone towards a Town Manager form of government.

Next week (April 15th) the draft report will be presented to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Petkovich asked all members to attend.

The Next meeting of the Commission will be May 27th

Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the Commission, Mr. Dillman made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Viets and approved by unanimous vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Koren, Recording Secretary