

Minutes of the Charter Revision Commission November 19, 2008

Present: Chairman Ernie Petkovich, Thomas J. Sheridan, Jr., Bobbie Kling, Eric Remington, Rodney Dillman John P. Murphy, and Douglas Viets. **Absent:** Elaine O'Brien. Mr. Petkovich called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Town Hall second floor conference room.

Citizen Input: Chairman Petkovich received a letter from Sami Mehmed, 10 Dara Lane. He had suggested seven changes all addressing going to an automatic referendum for the annual town budget. Mr. Petkovich responded to him telling him the Charter Revision Commission discussed this topic several times and had voted at the last meeting not to recommend this.

Minutes: Bobbie Kling made a motion, seconded by Doug Viets to accept the Minutes of November 12, 2008. The motion was approved by all voting in favor and Rod Dillman abstaining.

Discussion with Mr. Don Cianci from Columbia:

Chairman Petkovich introduced Mr. Cianci and explained that the Charter Revision Commission has been exploring a potential change in Suffield's form of Government.

Mr. Cianci said their Charter was revised 5 years from a First Selectman who served as CEO & CAO. They then hired a CAO and the First Selectman is part time (about 20 hours) and focuses on policy making and oversees the Town Administrator. By having a part time First Selectman, it allows more people to run for First Selectman. Their election cycle is four years for Selectmen. He said when he was elected, he had very little governmental experience and no administrative experience, but with a CAO now hired, things are working fine. His explained that his business office is across from Town Hall, so he is readily accessible and it makes it convenient for him to come into Town Hall. He felt Suffield has many more resources than Columbia, his support staff is very small. Therefore, a Town Administrator in a Town like his, is much more important. He commented that towns are fortunate that have First Selectmen who can handle the administration part very well.

Mr. Petkovich asked about the Human Resource functions. Mr. Cianci said they do not have any Unions, so, the Town Administrator oversees the H.R. functions, except cannot hire/fire employees. The Town Administrator's salary is \$85,000 with benefits better than the other employees. Their CAO has a law background.

Mr. Cianci said the Board of Selectmen can remove the CAO with a vote of 4 out of 5. In Columbia they go to a Town Meeting for just about everything. He finds that cumbersome and time consuming. He would like the Town Administrator to have more

power and not have to go to Town Meetings for everything. He also said that he would be totally against a residency requirement for a CAO.

Mr. Petkovich said Mr. Skinner had submitted a statement of suggestions for Suffield. It was a summary of both the towns of Canton and Columbia. Mr. Skinner suggested creating a CAO position to include the functions of Human Resources. The CAO should have the authority to hire and fire, execute contracts, and be a non-voting participant in Board of Selectmen's meetings. The CAO should supervise all departments including those with Commissions. There is a need to distinguish between policy makers and administrators. We should also maintain the current Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance and Town Meeting form of government.

Mr. Cianci concurred by stating that we should not underestimate the importance of the First Selectman. The First Selectman should remain the leader and visionary for the Town.

Mr. Cianci left the meeting and the Commission continued to discuss the CAO positions of both Canton and Columbia, and discussed which way we want to go.

Draft of Town Administrator:

The Commission discussed whether or not the First Selectman should be full or part time. Bobbie Kling felt that salary is going to have an effect on what the Commission decides to do. In these economic times, two full time paid town officials probably won't get passed the voters.

Mr. Dillman said the Board of Finance can set the salary for the CAO and First Selectman. In order to make this work right, a Commission member felt we have to give the CAO the flexibility to restructure which would mean some people's positions may go away. It may also mean the elimination of the Fire and Police Commissions and well as other Boards or Commissions.

The Commission took a straw vote on whether they want a Town Administrator or not, and most were in favor to move forward in that direction. However, how the job description is written will determine if they vote in favor of it or not. Mr. Dillman will do a draft for Town Counsel and outside counsel to review. As the description reads now, the First Selectman's position will remain full time.

Discussion then centered around the Human Resource duties. The draft job description states that this will fall under the Town Administrator. The Commission was concerned that the salary for a full time First Selectman at \$78,000 and a Town Administrator at \$120,000 could be a problem for the voters to accept. However, if the salary of \$65,000 for the Human Resource Director is brought into the \$120,000 CAO salary, that would not make as much of an impact on the salary.

Further discussion on the duties of the Town Administrator continued for some time with a focus on which town employees the Town Administrator would have supervisory authority over.

Section 611(b) of the Charter: This needs to be revised entirely. It should be changed that the Director of Finance reports to the Town Administrator. This will be added to the Tracking Log. Mr. Dillman will work on the wording.

Adjournment:

Bobbie Kling made a motion to adjourn, the motion was seconded and approved by unanimous vote. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Transcribed by tape recording
Christine Koren, Recording Secretary

NEXT MEETING: DECEMBER 17TH AT 7 P.M. SUFFIELD SENIOR CENTER