

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

The Charter Revision Commission held a regular meeting directly following a Public Hearing at the Senior Center, 14 Riverside Road, Sandy Hook, CT on Thursday, August 16, 2012. John Godin called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Present: James Ritchie, Robert Hall, George "Nick" Schmidt, John Godin, Allan Song, Anthony Filiato, Michelle Embree Ku, Craig Lehecka, George Coleman, James Ritchie

Absent: None

Also Present: Selectman Jim Gaston, Dan Wiedemann of the Legislative Council, 2 members of the public and 2 members of the press.

Approval of the minutes – Mr. Coleman moved to accept the minutes from the August 14, 2012 meeting. Mr. Schmidt seconded. In "Discussion on recommended proposals by commission members" the first line in the 5th paragraph the word should read effectuate, not officiate. In the same section in 7th paragraph, second sentence should read, "Her impression from elected officials is that if the budget is bifurcated, the environment of cooperation and collaboration might change". Motion carried with corrections.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion on voter comments – NONE

Discussion on draft recommendations – Separating debt services is not something that can be voted on so it is not favorable to split it out on the ballot. Mr. Hall suggested having the fail safe mechanism with a town meeting can be changed easily. Mr. Schmidt agrees that the debt services needs to be broken out because many people do not know that this is carried by the Selectman's side. We cannot be voting on the debt services as the general appropriation of debt services.

Option A = red draft proposal – On the red Draft proposal (Option A), the lead in statement is a question that looks like it should be voted on. You cannot make a statement on the ballot; it has to be a question. Mr. Filiato explained that the debt services should be explained outside the budget. Mr. Schmidt explained that this option is split with a yes, no too high, no too low. This forces a no choice. It gives the Legislative Council some direction on what way to move. There are caveats; debt services and whether it is binding or non-binding. Mr. Schmidt expressed his desire for a binding budget. If not, why not have a unified budget. The Legislative Council would retain judgment to pass what the budget they need to pass. There is no proposal that will guarantee a positive result on the first shot. Mr. Filiato explained that a unitary budget with non-binding advisory questions, brings the town back to the 1990s. A binding bifurcated budget is the way to go. The one that passes, passes, and the other will either be reduced, or increased which will increase the mill rate. Mr. Lahecka would like the information of the budget out there first instead of seeing it on the budget. If you are going to have a non-binding bifurcated budget, you might as well have a unified budget with advisory question, too high, too low.

Option B = Working Draft – Mr. Godin explained that the context is to ask two questions and advisory only questions because historically the premise of voting no means too high. Mr. Hall is in support of this option rather than Option A. Mr. Schmidt commented that both ballots accomplish the same end.

He feels the no too high, no too low is clearer. Mr. Godin suggested that if they find that advisory question do not work, they can take them out.

Binding vs. Non-binding – Mr. Godin explained that he feels that if he was on the Legislative Council, he would want one side completed and then focus on the other side. Mr. Coleman said that the big conundrum is that it limits the sources that the elected offices have to settle budget. We know what we can afford to pay, and we want people to back decisions within that limit. When you take that off the table it will result in an increase to the mill rate.

Mr. Ritchie explained that if there was a split non-binding budget he could not imagine the Legislative Council doing a whole lot with the one that passed. For example the Selectman's budget passes and the BOE budget passes, the members of the Legislative Council are not going to do much to the side that passes, that is political suicide.

Mr. Hall moved to set as their policy if they choose to bifurcate the budget it will be binding. This does not include the advisory questions. Mr. Schmidt seconded. Mr. Ritchie is concerned about what they are doing with advisory questions and the way the split was crafted which could sway him one way or the other. Ms. Embree Ku agrees that the Legislative Council is not going to take a yes vote and disregard it; they will use their better judgment. Mr. Hall withdrew his motion.

Mr. Schmidt moved that the budget moving forward be bifurcated. Mr. Hall seconded. Motion carried YES 7 – NO 2 (Embree Ku, Schmidt)

Mr. Hall supplied a red-line version of the charter. The proposal assumes a binding vote. This document will be cleaned up for the Monday meeting for Commission to review.

Mr. Hall moved to adopt binding Option B (working draft) as the ballot with advisory only questions. Mr. Lahecka seconded. Motion carried YES 6 - NO 3 (Song, Schmidt, Filiato)

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion and possible action on specific charge from Legislative Council - NONE

Voter Comments –

Bob Nielson, 8 Newfield Lane – He is very confused about the process it took to get to where they are. He wanted split binding budget but he would have preferred option A.

John Moran, 12 Lantern Drive – The selectman has been using a statue for the town meeting. He has reservations about the legality about her use of town meetings. Mr. Lahecka replied that we all would like a better mechanism but it is out of their scope.

ANNOUNCEMENTS - None

Having no further business, meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Arlene Miles, Clerk

Attachments: Ballot Option A
Ballot Option B

Option A

PROPOSED BALLOT

SHALL THE SUM OF \$ _____ BE APPROPRIATED AS THE ANNUAL TOWN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR _____ (WHICH INCLUDES \$ _____ OF REQUIRED DEBT SERVICE)? THE REMAINING APPROPRIATION WILL BE DIVIDED BETWEEN TOWN OPERATIONS AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AS FOLLOWS (VOTE FOR BOTH CATEGORIES):

THE TOWN OPERATIONS PORTION OF THE APPROPRIATION SHALL BE \$ _____:

- YES
- NO, TOO HIGH
- NO, TOO LOW

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION PORTION OF THE APPROPRIATION SHALL BE \$ _____:

- YES
- NO, TOO HIGH
- NO, TOO LOW

Option B

- WORKING DRAFT -

Shall the sum of \$_____ be appropriated as the Board of Selectman's budget for the fiscal year?

Yes _____

No _____

Shall the sum of \$_____ be appropriated as the Board of Education's budget for the fiscal year?

Yes _____

No _____

Advisory Only:

Do you deem the proposed sum of \$_____ for the Board of Selectman's budget as too low?

Yes _____

No _____

Do you deem the proposed sum of \$_____ for the Board of Education's budget as too low?

Yes _____

No _____