

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
CHARTER REVISION CHARGE COMMITTEE MEETING  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE:** Judit DeStefano, Ryan Knapp (7:20), Andy Clure, Jordana Bloom, Phil Carroll, and Chris Eide. Also present: Paul Lundquist

**ABSENT:**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. DeStefano called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

**MINUTES:** Motion to approve minutes of 12/1 by Chris Eide; Second by Ms. Bloom; All (but Mr. Knapp who was not yet present) approved; Mr. Lundquist noted we should make sure agenda is appropriately titled in town calendar and all communications.

**VOTER COMMENT:** None

**NEW BUSINESS**

Update from Mr. Ludquist sent out 25 emails to chairs of all boards mentioned in the Charter. He asked for a reply no later than Jan 25 set as deadline.

*Discussion of potential items for consideration brought forward by LC members-*

- Board of Education election process. Issue was that our language needed to call out statute. CT General Statute 9-204b to be referenced. Dealt with in ordinance prior to last affected election but could be codified in Charter, ordinance then should be redacted.
- Land use; acquisition and disposition of property. What happens when town sells a building but owns land? The charter deals with leasing and disposition, but how is it addressed if land is town-owned and building is privately owned? Look to NYA for reference?
- Appropriations by LC - no distinction made between special and emergency appropriations in respect to cap and limits – could lead to appropriation cap being met very early in the year; or worse, an inability to address emergency needs.
- Time to fill a vacancy on boards and commissions. Could it be 60 days as opposed to 45 as is currently? Mr. Knap notes that noticing, interviewing, reviewing applicants takes time and there are constraints with existing meeting schedules of boards, making it at times challenging to complete the task in such a short period of time.

For consideration and with more varying viewpoints -

- BOF and LC redundancy – BOF in the past functioned to establish systematic change; role was to be thought leaders and doing research/setting long term plans. Currently much of the work done by the BOF is duplicated by the LC. The appropriation and budget process are cumbersome and slower than necessary. Suggestions include: (1) Making them an appointed body (potentially more objective/less political) would look at CIP and debt service and advise the LC; role would be reassessed and overhauled. (2) Merge LC and BOF; fold BOF into finance and admin committee of LC, potentially add seats to LC? (3) Alternatively, empower BOF with authority in respect to town finances. Mr. Lundquist suggests starting the discussion but considering this for a future revision or a separate, stand-alone charter revision effort.
- Town Clerk could be a hired, as opposed to elected, position. Most CT towns and Newtown's peer groups have similar (elected) structure for town clerk; however, there is little or no accountability when an elected official serves in this role as it currently stands. There may be a benefit to it being a democratically elected position; but some feel the position would be better as an appointed one so the clerk reports and is accountable to the First Selectmen as are other hired town employees.

- Term limits could be set for various boards – Some thoughts for consideration: Possibly 8 year max for 2-year elected terms, BOE 2 terms in a row. Drawbacks include having limited pool of willing and qualified volunteer candidates and shuffling between boards to meet restriction requirements. Is it really a problem?
- LC districts – are they obsolete at this point? LC as currently structured mandates representation geographically. This change would allow for more significant minority representation; and the LC members do represent one town. Some members feel there is merit to districting because they know and can advocate best for their district. It's also noted, the LC is the only districted (not town-wide) body.

*Review of Timeline/Calendar*

The intention is to have feedback from committees/commissions in by Jan. 25; revisions queued up by early Feb.; and committee to begin work by early March. Next meeting will likely be Tues Jan 5, 7 pm.

**VOTER COMMENT:** None

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** None

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business, Mr, Eide moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:16 pm. Seconded by Ms. Bloom. All in favor.

*Respectfully submitted,*

Judit DeStefano  
Chairperson, Charter Revision Charge Committee

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL CHARTER  
REVISION CHARGE COMMITTEE AT THE NEXT MEETING**

**Ryan Knapp (sent by ryan.w.knapp@gmail.com)**

Hello Judit,

Ahead of our meeting tonight, I wanted to send you the items I have been tracking that I would like to see looked into as part of the charge of the upcoming Charter Revision Commission which I will be suggesting.

- Time to fill a vacancy on boards and commissions. Currently the window is 45 days. I would like to see that expanded to 60 days. Serving on a candidates committee was illuminating, and it takes time to notice the vacancy, gather responses, set interviews, vote, make recommendations to the BOS and have them act in a regular meeting. This is made more difficult by scheduled meetings which serve to cut days from that 45 day period. I believe expanding the window would allow for a better search, more candidates interviewed and over time, improved expertise on commissions to the benefit of the Town.

- The changing role of the Board of Finance and getting it back to a non-partisan, objective board of experts. I do not believe the BOF should be elected, rather I think as an advisory board, its membership should be appointed. This would change the determining factor in the composition of the board from electability to expertise. For example, if this body were appointed I have complete confidence Armel Kouassi would be a member given his resume and experience. It would also allow the body to explore challenging subjects without political concerns and worry of forthcoming elections.

As it stands, the BOF is not a BOF as exists in other communities (serving the financial role of the LC while BOS handle ordinances,) nor does it make sense giving the financial responsibilities of the LC to the BOF as it would leave the LC with only the legislative responsibilities. It has in many ways become redundant with the Council, both being elected bodies, subject to political pulls, and both steps in the appropriations process. There is a lot of overlap which, as members of the BOE pointed out, slows and confuses the appropriations process.

I would like to see this body renamed "Finance Advisory Board," and be tasked with independent research and unique work, looking for new, outside the box ideas to improve Newtown from a financial perspective, and lead the conversation rather than reacting to it. I would also like to see them as a resource for other boards to come to, rather than reacting to what comes down from the BOS. I envision a body that is a thought leader, returning to the days when it fostered ideas like medical self insurance and a plan to build our fund balance to lower our bond rating.

- Emergency appropriations following what happened with the macroburst storm.

- Disposition of property as it relates to buildings on town owned land.

Thank you,

-Ryan