

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORKGROUP
REGULAR MEETING, June 26, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER, NEWTOWN MUNICIPAL CENTER
3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT

These minutes are subject to approval by the Work Group

MINUTES

PRESENT: Pat Llodra, Ned Simpson and Maureen Crick Owen

ABSENT: Bill Brimmer

ALSO PRESENT: Karen Burnaska of Monroe and two members of the press

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by the chair Mrs. Crick Owen.

VOTER COMMENTS – None

DISCUSSION WITH MONROE

Mrs. Karen Burnaska, Former First Selectwoman

Recording available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vFdHmKuu0sZBsB0CmzQlrS1SEgwthAhU/view?usp=sharing>

Mrs. Burnaska provided a history of the various forms of town government Monroe has used over the years. Her personal experience in town government dates to 1981 when she was elected to Town Council. Prior to 1967, Monroe had a First Selectman – Town Meeting form of government. In 1967, through charter revision, a town council – town manager – town meeting form of government was adopted. The nine member council, elected at large, selected their chair and hired the Town Manager. Over the next 20 years there were two or three town managers. The last Town Manager was very competent, unflappable, but not one to jump to respond to resident inquiries.

People wanted a direct say in the budget and one person to hold accountable through the election of their top leader. They wanted a say on the budget. This led to a 1988 charter revision. This established a First Selectman – Town Council form of government. The change included an automatic budget referendum, so residents did not have to petition for a budget referendum. At the time both the council chair and Mrs. Burnaska opposed the change in large because it did away with professional management.

This charter revision produced a “Weak Mayor” form of Government. Weak because of all the elected officials and automatic budget referendum. In addition to the automatic budget referendum, a referendum can be petitioned for any purchase of land or major expenditure Town Council, treasure, tax collector, clerk, board of finance and board of education are all elected. The First Selectman has bottom line authority over the school’s budget. The chair of the council was the first First Selectman who served for six years followed by Mrs. Burnaska serving from 1995 through 2001.

In the 1990s there was a charter revision initiative to put a limit on the number of petitioned referendums based on an argument that First Selectman, Town Council,

board of finance, board of education were elected. If voters were unhappy, they could vote out the incumbents. It did not pass.

Reflecting back to her time as First Selectman, she believes the expectations of a First Selectman exceed what can be reasonably expected from one person. When she was elected, she had 17 direct reports. There was never enough time for planning and visioning. Since then, political, regional and local responsibilities have increased. Mrs. Burnaska related a story that her youngest son would not go to the grocery store with her because everyone wanted to talk. Mrs. Burnaska also talked about the increase pace of communications leading to an expectation for immediate response.

Monroe's current First Selectman had created what Mrs. Burnaska calls "Super Managers" by elevating certain department heads to responsibility over a number of what had been separate departments. Grouping Planning, Economic Development, and Building and Zoning was an example.

Mrs. Llodra pointed out the common rub of professional management versus residents desire to vote for their top leader.

DISCUSSION WITH GREENWICH

Mr. Fred Camillo, First Selectman of Greenwich

Recording available at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oVbVwUQdx_w1ZeVyuTJugdk8dLa2BrK/view?usp=sharing

[At the March 30, 2023 meeting, Ben Branyan, Town Administrator met with the Work Group meeting.]

Mr. Camillo spent 11 years in the CT Legislature before being elected First Selectman in Greenwich. He is in his second two-year term. The charter considers First Selectman a full-time responsibility. It is a 24/7 job. For the two other people on the Board of Selectman, it's part time.

Their Town Administrator handles a lot of the day-to-day stuff where he is heavily involved in the details. Over the 11 town departments, but only 30% of the employees report to the First Selectman. The biggest being police, fire, public works, and parks & recreation. 70% of town employees report to independent boards and commissions, such as board of education, health department and planning and zoning. Town Administrator has been a full time position since about 1970. The current Town Administrator was in place when Mr. Camillo was first elected. Without the Town Administrator, the First Selectman wouldn't be able to do the constituent services that he does.

Asked, for example, whether he gets involved in labor negotiations, Mr Camillo replied that the town recently hired a labor negotiator, and he is involved. He does all the employee evaluations for the department heads that report to him. His regular meetings include finance board, department heads, planning and zoning, and Representative Town Meeting (RTM) leadership.

The Town Administrator is a municipal employee, not under contract. He is not part of the bargaining unit. Review and compensation handled similar to that of a department head. Mr. Camillo has hire and terminate authority for the Town Administrator role. The town looks to keep the compensation competitive, not only with other towns, but with outside opportunities. The First Selectman and Town Administrator talk daily. Mr.

Camillo considers a major Town Administrator responsibility to be carrying out the priorities of the First Selectman. They have a very collaborative work relationship.

Mr. Camillo described how the Town Administrator has been a full-time position since about 1970. There has been little turnover in the position. Mr. Camillo's predecessor had three Town Administrators in twelve years. Mrs. Llodra asked if there has been consideration of going to a Town Manager form of government. Mr Camillo indicated that there has not been.

Mr. Simpson asked what Mr Camillo considers the most important characteristics and skills need for a successful Town Administrator? Mr Camillo looks to municipal experience and where the candidate had that experience.

Mr. Camillo stated that municipal government has gotten more complex. Greenwich RTM has 230 representatives elected from 12 districts. Mr Camillo pointed out that it is the 4th largest elected body in the country.

OLD BUSINESS

Recording available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NhQPW--5c3k3GtX6TRGrsAu8fr7-62i8/view?usp=sharing>

Follow-up discussions

As Mr. Brimmer was unable to attend, discussion on common themes we have heard, and the Work Group report was deferred to our next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Next Steps

There are no more interviews scheduled with leaders of reference towns. At our next meeting, Monday July 10, at 3:30 pm. We will discuss what each of us submitted as common themes and the Work Group report.

Given that any Work Group recommendation(s) would be implemented by the First Selectman and BOS elected next November, inviting the First Selectmen candidates to engage in our work seems worthwhile.

Future agenda will include "Discussion of Recommendations. Minutes will not include drafts, nor discussion details. Recording of the meetings will be publicly available.

VOTER COMMENTS - None

Mr. Simpson moved to adjournment. Mrs. Llodra seconded. All in favor, motion passes.
The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Simpson