



TOWN OF MADISON
CONNECTICUT 06443

MEETING DATE:

Thursday, February 25, 2021

MEETING PLACE:

Zoom

SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

**Charter Review Commission
Public Hearing
Minutes**

Members Present: Joe MacDougald (Chair), Liz Daly, Matthew Gordon, Noreen Kokoruda, Robert O'Connor, David Osterman, Joan Walker

Others Present: Peggy Lyons, First Selectwoman
Lauren Rhines, Town Services Coordinator / Risk Manager

The Public Hearing convened at approximately 7:00 p.m.

- Call to Order.
Chairman MacDougald provided an overview of the process for this meeting and for the review of the Charter in general.

The other members of the Committee introduced themselves to the public.

- Public Comment.

Walter Welsh of Grove Avenue stated that he was here to learn; he stated that the Committee should consider how the Town moves forward with independent/unaffiliated voters. Noreen Kokoruda thanked Mr. Welsh for his perspective.

Tom Hansen of Princess Drive stated that he remembered the 2015 Charter review process and he spoke then about his desire to maintain the Town Meeting form of government. He feels he may have gotten away from that now; and would encourage the committee to look strongly at a Town Manager. He stated that sometimes there is a lack of continuity in administration and sometimes that means that we lose the institutional background of why/how some decisions are made. He added that someone who takes ownership of projects is also very important. For instance, with the beach pass system. He added that he watched the Selectmen struggle with a solar project last year and part of the struggle was because a former Board had enacted a solar policy that wasn't currently understood. He stated that the

Plan of Conservation and Development has not yielded any projects and other projects which are older have not gone anywhere. Again he stated that a Town Manager would be worthwhile to look into as it would remove the decision making from the "political arena." Chairman MacDougald asked Mr. Hansen to provide an overview of how the WPCA of which Mr. Hansen is Chairman, is supported by the Town.

Justin Murphy of Wyndy Brook Lane and the Board of Finance thanked the Committee for their commitment. He suggested extending the First Selectman term to four years and/or to look into a Town Manager for the Town. He also added that the staff is imperative to the success of the Town and staff needs continuity of oversight.

Gus Horvath of Aylesbury Circle stated that if the Town were to move to a Town Manager, the cost would be about \$75,000 more than what we're paying now for the First Selectman which is roughly a.006 mil or \$.28/year for each \$1,000 of the assessed tax value. However, the Committee should also consider extending the term length for the Board of Selectmen. The other issue he sees is having a Legislative Body of roughly \$14,000 but the quorum requirement is only 75. Again he stated the Committee should consider how the CEO position is filled and what type of Legislative Body best serves the Town. He recommends a Town Manager and a 14 member council with the Chair being elected Town-wide. He recommended the Committee review the latest Simsbury Charter.

Bruce Wilson of Dairy Hill and the Board of Selectmen stated that as a taxpayer he has always like the idea that the Board can be "fired" every two years; however, as a Selectman he notes the learning curve for newly elected officials and stated that four year terms would allow them more time to learn the ropes. Regarding the Town Manager, as the Committee devotes energy to creating the position, the Committee needs to be clear in what problem currently exists that would be solved by a Town Manager. Also, the Committee should consider the last 12 months and how the rigidity of the Charter has impacted the efficient running of government. For instance, it was an inconvenience for the Board to declare an Emergency every three weeks and instead the Charter could be updated to include language to allow an Emergency for a period not to exceed a longer time frame. There are specified Boards and Commissions in the Charter and it might make more sense to move these to Ordinance versus Charter. He added that additionally he felt that spending money outside of the current approved budget should not be "easy" for the Boards of Selectmen or Finance. He felt the threshold should not be moved from the current \$50,000. He added that new technologies might create better opportunities for expanded voter access.

John Dobson of Horsepond Road stated that he was commenting in favor of an RTM and that an RTM could serve as more of a legislature. The Board of Selectmen could be extended to 4 year terms and the RTM members could be appointed to 2 year terms.

Susan Glantz of Green Hill Road thanked the Committee for their commitment and stated that she supports a Town Manager in Madison. She liked the hybrid idea of the last Charter Review Committee as she does like the Town Meeting form of government. She stated that it would be extremely helpful to have an operations person running the day-to-day of the Town so that the First Selectman can focus on policy oversight with the rest of the Board. Also she supported the extended terms for the Board of Selectmen.

The Committee also noted that the current transition time for First Selectman which is currently less than one week is something that should be considered.

Noreen Kokoruda added that the First Selectman's role has never been ceremonial, it has always been a very involved role. She added that the First Selectman does have a lot to learn in 2 years however, a First Selectman can cause a lot of damage in two years, let alone four years. She added that by damage she means a loss of employee morale, loss of quality employees, etc. The Committee reviewed that they should ask Senior Staff about their feelings regarding the terms for the Selectmen.

Gus Horvath stated that the 2000 Charter established the Chief Administrator position and a number of towns in Connecticut have someone in this role to buffer between the First Selectman and the rest of the staff.

VOTE: the motion was passed unanimously.

- Adjourn.

There being no objections, the Public Hearing adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lauren Rhines
Town Services Coordinator / Risk Manager