

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
APRIL 9, 2015**

Present: Bob Brooks, Brian Fitzgerald, Robert Parks, Jeff Kew, Brian Dudack, Charles Watras and Bobbie Kling (via teleconference for a portion of the meeting). First Selectman Ed McAnaney was also in attendance. Chairman Brooks called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from March 26, 2015 Regular Meeting

Mr. Fitzgerald made a motion to accept the minutes of the March 19th Regular Meeting of the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) as presented. Mr. Dudack seconded the motion. Vote 4-0 in favor with Mr. Parks abstaining and Ms. Kling absent.

Correspondence Received: None

Public Comment: None

Thank you letters to public commenters

Chairman Brooks said that Mr. Watras had suggested that the public be thanked for their input. Chairman Brooks suggested that a reply email be sent saying the following: "Thank you for your comments, questions and input for the Suffield Charter Review Commission. All public input is reviewed by the Commission members and is viewed as an important component of our deliberations."

All members were agreeable to the suggestion.

Chairman Brooks initiated a teleconference with Ms. Kling at 7:06 p.m. and she joined the meeting.

Quorum, voting majority

Chairman Brooks suggested that a quorum should be defined as 5 members and that a voting majority should be defined as 4 members. Mr. Fitzgerald suggested that the voting majority should consist of 4 positive votes so abstentions don't come into play.

Mr. Brooks formalized his motion that the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) must have 5 members to constitute a quorum and that 4 positive votes are needed to qualify as a voting majority. Mr. Parks seconded the motion. Mr. Fitzgerald suggested that a role call be used to record the major votes. Mr. Watras noted the requirement that all meetings need to be properly noticed. Vote 7-0 in favor.

Ms. Kling left the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Selectmen 4 year vs. 2 year term.

Chairman Brooks began by saying that there was a spirited discussion in the prior meeting regarding changing the selectmen term from 2 years to 4 years. He had

previously suggested the CRC recommend that the question go directly to referendum rather than to have the CRC vote on it. Mr. Parks said that it is a hot button issue and agreed that it should be decided at a referendum instead of the CRC making a recommendation. Mr. Brooks noted that at a special election Charter changes must be passed by an affirmative vote of at least 15% of the electorate. Mr. Fitzgerald said that if held at a local election a simple majority decides the issue. The Board of Selectmen makes the decision of how and when the questions get on a ballot. Chairman Brooks asked the other members if the whole Board of Selectmen terms should be changed or should the First Selectman vs. other members be considered separately? Discussion followed about staggering the elections so that three members are elected in one cycle followed by two in the subsequent election. There also was discussion about how the simple majority representation rule has made the election less competitive since the Democratic and Republican Town Committees each nominate two candidates who simply run unopposed and are automatically elected. Mr. Fitzgerald said to make it more competitive the loser of the First Selectman's election race could be allowed to let his/her votes count in the Board of Selectmen race. It was noted that each party can nominate 3 candidates for the Board of Selectmen but neither does since they don't want to waste one volunteer who would lose. That volunteer wouldn't be able to be on any other elected board until the next election. Mr. Watras noted that the loser of the First Selectman race is assumed to be highly qualified and is sacrificed. Mr. McAnaney said that he believed the change in 2001's charter that took away the ability of the loser of the First Selectman's race was the result of a losing First Selectman candidate who made their term as a selectman very contentious. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that decisions shouldn't be made over personalities. Furthermore, on a five member board the negative influence is diluted and sometimes you need a loyal oppositionist. Mr. McAnaney suggested that if you eliminated the simple majority rule and went back to the minority representation rule defined in the State Statute and you'd have a more competitive race. Mr. Watras stated that you could have more losers that way since each party could run 5 candidates. He said that as a member of the 2001 CRC, the intent of the charter change was to increase the pool of candidates since there has been a short tenure in First Selectmen for some time. Mr. Fitzgerald said most people would not want to interrupt their career for a two year term. Mr. Watras agreed that it was a fundamental problem with our form of government. Mr. Parks noted that the First Selectmen position has only been full time in the last twenty years and before that the First Selectman was part time and was assumed to have outside employment. He also noted that he would not be inclined to support a Chief Financial Officer (CFO)/Town Administrator position at \$100,000+ annually and a First Selectman. He asked if administrative duties were given to the CFO would we need a full time First Selectman? Mr. Fitzgerald said that in the past ten years many directives from the state have necessitated the need to streamline and strengthen day to day management by a First Selectman. Mr. Watras said that with a number of the charge items and shifting tenure on the Board of Selectmen it appears like the First Selectman position has a career possibility from 2 – 15 years. The discussion turned to the idea of a Town Manager/Administrator with the following points being made :

- Mr. McAnaney had a philosophical concern over removing the element of

- election moving towards a municipal corporation which becomes governing by elite (Town Manager). He sees the electorate losing their involvement with a Town Manager.
- Mr. Watras said he'd be satisfied with elevating a question to the electorate to see if they are in support of a professional Town Manager.
 - Mr. Brooks said that the last CRC recommended a Town Administrator (TA) that was quite different from a typical Town Manager. He asked if the TA would be in lieu of a First Selectman or would report to a First Selectman?
 - Mr. Watras said there has been an underlying current for 20 years surrounding the Town manager/administrator issue noting that it comes up in debates, elections, and informal groups.
 - Mr. Fitzgerald would hope to find a happy medium that citizens will like between the way a First Selectman operated 40 years ago and a corporate look.
 - Mr. McAnaney said a compromise would be a 4 year term where more of a track record can be established. He noted that no other government level (state or federal) cedes its' authority to an unelected administrator.
 - Mr. Kew agreed with Mr. Watras that a Town Manager should be considered largely due to the amount of Public Comment received.
 - Mr. Fitzgerald said that as a member of the Board of Selectmen he doesn't think the recommendation would go forward to the electorate.
 - Chairman Brooks asked if the group wanted to spend their time on this since it was done by the last CRC in great detail and all for naught as it was voted down by the board of Selectmen unanimously?
 - Mr. McAnaney said he read the last Charter reports and said the concern appeared to be over the loss of corporate knowledge between First Selectmen. He said the corporate knowledge exists at the Director level. They have many years in their positions.
 - Mr. Fitzgerald said that if the Town was eager for a professional manager one party would migrate that way to support the concept.
 - Mr. Parks said the conversation has made good points and that he has been in agreement with both sides over time. He believes that the CFO structure may reduce the desire for a Town Manager.
 - Mr. Watras said the CRC has an obligation to the voters. The CRC needs to work from the charge list but also can consider anything they choose. He said people have more frequently expressed interest in this issue than any other. If the idea is not going anywhere the public needs an explanation from the commission of why they are not considering it.
 - Mr. Watras said that if it is the pleasure of the committee to put the issue of Town Manager aside that is okay. But if the reason that for doing so is that it has no traction with the Board of Selectmen that is not a good reason. But if that's the practicality then the group owes it to itself to say we're not going to take it up because we've been advised that it's not an issue that is looked upon favorably by the Board of Selectmen.
 - A brief discussion followed and the members present agreed that the question of

whether or not to consider a change of government to a profession management form of government was permanently tabled in light of the fact that the Board of Selectmen indicated that it is a non-issue.

- Mr. Fitzgerald explained that the Selectmen didn't want the group to spend a lot of time on something that wouldn't make it. Mr. Brooks echoed that there was a lot of work to be done in the compressed time frame which makes spending time on an issue with no traction a waste of the committee's time.
- Mr. Kew noted that some people felt strongly that the CRC should be run very independently of the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Kew said he felt that way too but the Selectmen said them being involved will give the Commission a better chance for success. Mr. Fitzgerald said that the State Statute defines the roles of the appointing body. Mr. McAnaney noted that the Board of Selectmen have a lot of insight in the inner workings of Town government. Mr. Kew said that he'd be happy to look at a Town Manager but as a practical matter he's not seeing that as likely to happen.

It was agreed to discuss the CFO position at the next meeting. Ms. Kling had previously noted that job description for CFO should be developed. Mr. McAnaney has said it should be left to the discretion of the Town. Mr. Fitzgerald didn't think it was appropriate for the CRC to define the CFO position. Mr. Parks agreed that a conceptual level would be sufficient. Mr. McAnaney re-iterated that the charter is the Town's constitution and would be up to the Selectmen to define the details of the position.

Mr. Kew asked to reconsider interviewing past First Selectmen about items in the charge dealing with the First Selectman. Mr. Kew suggested at least speaking to former First Selectman, Tom Frenaye. Mr. Fitzgerald suggested possibly getting comments from more than one past First Selectman. He noted that the timeframe would not really allow for interviews with multiple First Selectmen. Mr. Brooks indicated that he thought that going past Tom Frenaye was too far in the past for the opinions to be useful. Mr. Watras thought the term length would be of interest. He believes that all of the former First Selectmen would be proponents of longer terms. Mr. Kew would be interested in hearing about reporting relationships.

Chairman Brooks said he wants to discuss the CFO and Director of Finance along with the possibility of the referendum percentage with a secondary threshold at the next meeting. After consensus on those items the group could move on to Selectmen reporting relationships, the Board of Selectmen term changes including interviews with former First Selectmen. Mr. Brooks suggested structuring questions for the First Selectmen interviews.

Mr. Parks moved to adjourn. Mr. Dudack seconded. After a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Next Meeting will be held on April 16th.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Trase
Recording Secretary