

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Hadley Rose called the Regular Meeting of the Simsbury Charter Revision Commission to order at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, February 4, 2016. The meeting was held in the Board of Education Conference Room of the Simsbury Town Offices located at 933 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT. In attendance were the following commission members: Paul Henault, Anita Mielert, Jeffrey Tindall, Melissa Osborne, Lydia Tedone, Thomas Benneche, James Ray, Edward Pabich and Robert Crowther. Staff included Tom Cooke, Director of Administrative Services and Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Ms. Joan Coe of 26 Whitcomb Drive said the Commission should add a Town Manager position to the Charter. Granby, Avon and Farmington all have lower mill rates and higher property values than Simsbury. She mentioned the testimony from Chuck Howard and Rob Heagney that highlighted attributes that suggested policies of past First Selectmen brought forward that were visionary. She added there was no mention of risk management that requires knowledge of laws and regulations that a Town Manager possesses. Ms. Coe said that she took an informal survey of Simsbury's town employees and they all felt that they would be better served taking direction from a Town Manager. She recommended the Town Manager position should be the only change in the government since more variables will lead to more confusion when the public votes on the Charter. Ms. Coe urges the Commission to leave all other issues to another Charter Revision.

Mr. Robert Kalechman of 971 Hopmeadow Street said that he is appearing again on behalf of the ordinance to restore the Constable position. He added that the offices should be restored and the First Selectman should decide if they are used.

Mr. Carl Meyer of 7 Deepwood said currently we don't have term limits or an election for Board of Education seats. Voters are told to vote for two of the four candidates listed. In our town, all four are already on the Board of Education and they remain on the board regardless of votes. The elections are meaningless. The BOE members are always appointed by the Town political committees. They are traditionally reappointed over and over for 20 years. We don't gain the benefit of new members. He suggested replacing two members every two years and have eight-year term limits. He explained that if you replace two board members out of eight, every eight years, then the remaining six will continue to provide continuity.

Also, another issue Mr. Meyer stated was that a third of the town's registered voters are independents and there are no seats for independents on the BOE. He recommends that the Commission votes on

this matter and existing BOE members on Charter Revision Commission should recuse themselves from voting.

Dr. Mike Renaldi of 32 Pinnacle Mountain Road said he has been a resident for 45 years. He said it took him 30 years to figure out that the town votes for two of the four BOE candidates yet all four get elected. He said that 60 years ago it was decided that the Board of Education is “a-political”. He said Commissioner Henault said that if the BOE is truly elected, then it will ruin the school system. Dr. Renaldi disagrees with that. If the BOE members stay forever, how can they evaluate if they are doing a good job? He mentioned several programs that he feels are examples of the BOE not doing a good job. Dr. Renaldi said we need a method to vote members off the board. The chance of getting on the board as an independent is like winning the lottery. He said a person in town told him that she can’t be on the BOE since she doesn’t have a child in the school system. In reference to Mr. Meyer’s comments, Dr. Renaldi doesn’t believe term limits will solve the problem. He is asking the Commission to somehow provide the public a choice.

PRESENTATION: West Hartford Mayor Scott Slifka and Town Manager Ronald F. Van Winkle

Mayor Scott Slifka has been serving as Mayor of West Hartford for almost 12 years and does not receive a salary. He said since 2000, it is more difficult to find people to serve as council members because of the workload. Some Zoning Commission meetings are six hours long. He said some insurance companies don’t allow their employees to put that amount of time in as a volunteer. He cautioned the Commission on the difficulty in finding a high caliber Town Manager. Thirty years ago, it was a popular career. Since then, a degree in town management has gone down in popularity. Mayor Slifka added in order to recruit a high caliber Town Manager; you need to take into account the salary of the First Selectman.

Mr. Ron Van Winkle said he has been the Town Manager for West Hartford for eight years. He said his goal is to make the town run smoothly. Mr. Van Winkle said, “This is not a great job. This is really a hard job.” He added that it requires a lot of time, effort, leadership and management. He admits to being an expert in garbage, police, zoning, in the management of government, finance, public pensions, administration of budgets and issuing bonds, because he does it every day. He suggested that Simsbury finds an economist for a Town Manager. He is an economist and the world runs on numbers. Mr. Van Winkle said he has a great working relationship with the superintendent. West Hartford has combined school and town management positions into one. That means one CFO, one I.T. manager, one hiring manager. It works well because they work at it.

Mayor Slifka answered questions from the Commission. He explained that the Mayor is the face of the town. The community wants to hear from the Mayor and expects him to act as if it’s his full-time job. Mayor Slifka said that he was the policy maker for Blue Back Square. The project needed to have political leadership to push it forward in order for the Town Manager to communicate with the community.

Mayor Slifka said in the beginning he worked 50-60 hours a week. Currently he averages 30-40 hours a week. Council meetings require a lot of his time. He said an elected official that doesn't have training can't do the job without a Town Manager. He learned how to govern from the Town Manager.

Mr. Van Winkle said that 90% of what he does is running the government administration, not changing or setting policy. He is employed at will and thinks a person behaves differently if they have a contract. He mentioned salaries are low for the level of person Simsbury may want.

Mayor Slifka said that a “strategic plan” is overrated since West Hartford and Simsbury are fully-developed towns. Instead, he lays the ground work for things to happen.

ACTION ITEMS

a. Review of Minutes – Special Meeting of January 21, 2016.

Minutes were approved as submitted.

b. Review of Possible Action on Boards and Commissions Required by the Charter

Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney, distributed to the Commission a Summary of Statutory Authority for Each Simsbury Board and Commission Created in the Charter. The Commission reviewed and discussed the topics. Commissioner Mielert suggested separating “Culture” from Parks and Recreation. People in Park and Recreation fields are trained in sports administration, not culture administration. She said the town is expanding culturally and it is very different than sports. Commissioner Osborne cautioned that staff is already overloaded on meetings to attend. She suggested for the Commission to find a way to remove the burden from staff if it is decided to create a new Commission. Commissioner Rose asked Tom Cooke to have members of the Culture, Parks and Recreation Commission to speak before the Commission.

Commissioner Osborne suggested circling back to the Economic Development Commission topic after the Commission decides on a form of government. Responsibilities of the Economic Development Commission could possibly change depending on the responsibilities of the First Selectman. Commissioner Mielert read from an Economic Development Task Force document that recommended the EDC should operate as a function of the CEO of the town. The CEO should be the primary contact responsible for economic development. According to state statutes, the EDC is supposed to do study and issues reports, not economic development. She added that developers don't want to speak with a committee. They want to speak with a person in private. She added that economic development isn't accomplished with a committee. Mr. Cooke answered Commissioner Rose's comment about the accomplishments of the EDC. He said that EDC helped change the website, which was a major project. The Economic Development Task Force has done a thorough job of reviewing the entire economic development process. They are a unique group because it doesn't have a staff or budget.

c. Discussion of and Possible Action on Length of Board and Commission Terms Required by the Charter.

Commissioner Rose said that he strongly feels the First Selectman should be a four-year term. By the time a new person is elected they are running for a new term. Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney said that he needs to check to see if a four-year term is permitted for a legislative body. Commissioner Mielert agreed with Commissioner Rose. She said that after six months, she had to start getting ready for the next election.

In regards to term limits of the Board of Education, Town Counsel said there are different models of the Board of Education that he can look into. Commissioner Henault suggested not making more changes to the Charter because it will cause more confusion to the voters. Commissioner Rose said they will revisit the topic after receiving Town Counsel’s information.

Commissioner Henault asked about the Constable position. Town Counsel said he will find documentation explaining the reason for the decision.

Commissioner Osborne questions if there is an unmet need without have a constable in town. Mr. Kalechman of 971 Hopmeadow Street responded from the audience and stated that the Board of Selectman selects the constable. Constables report to the First Selectman, not the Chief of Police. They have the power to arrest. They have the right to carry a firearm. They are not confined to Simsbury. In case of emergency, constables can be deputized and fill the gap.

Commissioner Rose asked for information from the Town Counsel and would like comments from the Chief of Police.

d. Discussion of Future Agenda Items

Commissioner Rose would like to make a decision about a Town Manager on March 3rd. Commissioner Henault suggested having a straw vote at the next meeting. The Committee voted to take a straw vote at the next meeting.

Topics of discussion at the next meeting: Review the committees to recommend or make changes, take up the constable issue, take a straw vote on Town Manager form of government and review information on BOE and possible vote.

The Commission agreed to allow Mr. Meyer to speak at this time as requested during the public hearing. Mr. Meyer introduced Mr. William Estell to speak on his behalf.

Mr. William Estell of 11 Laurel Lane said we don’t elect the Board of Education. We vote for two of the four candidates, yet all four remain on the BOE. He added that over a third of the towns are

registered as independent and they are not addressed in the BOE. The citizens of Simsbury don't realize the voting process for the BOE and the town should educate the public.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Mielert moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Benneche and was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,

Irene Muench