

CHARTER COMMISSION

Robert Russell, Chairman
Michael Kaelin, Vice Chairman



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TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, CT 06897

CHARTER COMMISSION

September 15, 2008

Meeting Room "B"

Wilton Town Hall

APPROVED

PRESENT: Robert Russell, Michael Kaelin, Paul Burnham, Marilyn Gould,
Louise Herot, Toni Lee ABSENT: Douglas Levene, Chris Weldon

GUESTS: Board of Education Chairman Karen Birck and Board of Education member
Richard Dubow

OTHERS: CFO Joe Dolan

Chairman Bob Russell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the August 26, 2008 meeting were approved.

The Chairman introduced Karen Birck, Chairman of the BOE and Dick Dubow, a member of the BOE. The Chairman had asked Ms. Birck to provide any comment from a BOE perspective on ways that the operation of the Town government and our Charter could be improved. No specific recommendations were offered.

She was asked for her thoughts on the following items:

Should the BOS should have an informal review of the Board of Ed operating budget after the BOE has approved it but before it goes to the BOF? Karen - Quite honestly, I don't know why the BOS would want to create the public perception that they have any control or oversight over the BOE operating budget when they have no authority over it. I think that this is something that could really hurt the BOS. You will raise the expectation among the people of Wilton that the BOS can do something and have some control over the BOE budget when they don't. I see that as a losing proposition.

Would the BOE consider comments made in good faith from the BOS? Karen - I think there are a lot of opportunities for the BOS to make those comments. The BOE has two or more workshops that are open to the public. We have never had BOS members but we frequently have BOF members attend. And then we have the BOE hearing on the superintendents recommended budget. They could have input there. Then there is the BOF hearing, but at that point we have already adopted the budget, it is the BOF budget. We take e-mail input from anyone. It just seems that it adds another layer of work that you have to do because the BOS, especially, are reviewing all of the department requests and this would be just another thing that they have to look at and it is the one that they have no control over.

In Ridgefield, the BOE budget and BOS budget are voted on separately. How do you feel about that? Karen – I personally don't think it is a good idea. In this time when we are all trying to tighten our belts, separating the budgets could actually increase the cost to the Town of Wilton. Most of the towns where the budget has been separate, Avon, Ridgefield, Bethel and Monroe, they typically take two or three trips to the polls to get both approved. It is also hard to totally separate the two budgets, i.e. playing fields maintenance, debt service, etc., where school expenses are included in the BOS budget.

How do you feel about minority representation on the BOE and the state law that pre-dated the minority representation law that says people can vote for no more than half of the positions? Karen – It did become an issue last time. Other than that, the way that it works right now hasn't caused a problem, but it could again.

The state has since adopted a statute that permits towns to change over and treat the BOE the same as all other boards by saying that if there are two vacancies for a partial term that each party could put up two candidates. Karen – from my personal perspective, I am all in favor of having more choices when voting. It is not something that the BOE has talked about.

Karen – After having read the minutes of the Charter Commission meeting with Rudy Marconi, I would be in favor of some language directing the BOF to look at the budget as a whole when deciding whether or not to approve it and pass it on to the voters, and not look so carefully at the line items. We found this year that there was a tendency for some of the newer BOF members to try to get into real minutiae in the BOE budget. We need to give some broader direction to BOF members like Ridgefield has done.

It was noted that there should be better direction given to new members of all boards and commissions. That could possibly be a Charter requirement. Back in February, First Selectman Brennan brought all chairpersons together to meet each other and distributed information to them about guidance for new members of a board. The BOE has a procedure for giving direction to newly elected members of the board.

Any thoughts on the bonding process from the BOE perspective? Karen – It has worked well. I feel that by the time anything approved for BOE bonding, it has been vetted by the BOS and the BOF.

What can be done in terms of the structure of the town meeting to encourage more participation? Karen – I don't think it is necessarily a structure of the TM question. People in

this town tend to turn out when there is some hot button, otherwise, if everything is okay, they don't come out.

Ms. Birck and Mr. Dubow were thanked for attending and left the meeting at this time.

There was a discussion of setting dates for future meetings. The next meeting is scheduled for 10/2/08. It was decided to also schedule 10/20/08 (at the Historical Society barn), one on 11/11/08 and on 11/25/08.

Having no further business, the meeting adjourned 7:52 pm.

Jan Andras

Recording Secretary

(not present – minutes taken from audio recording)