

CHARTER COMMISSION
Robert Russell, Chairman
Michael Kaelin, Vice Chairman



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TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, CT 06897

CHARTER COMMISSION
October 2, 2008
Meeting Room "B"
Wilton Town Hall

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

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

Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the September 9, 2008 meeting were unanimously approved as presented.

Mr. Burnham moved to approve the minutes of September 15, 2008 with the following amendment. On page 3 – first paragraph, add that “The Board of Education has a procedure for giving direction to newly elected members of the board.” Motion to approve minutes as amended unanimously carried.

Minority Representation

Mr. Kaelin distributed a written explanation of what happened last summer with the BOE elections, with information from Ms. Herot. The method that Wilton has been using predates the minority representation statute, which governs our election of all other boards. After some discussion, Mr. Kaelin moved to change our BOE election procedure to be consistent with all of the others. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Currently the BOE and BOF fill their own vacancies within 30 days. State Statutes would allow the BOS to make all of those vacancy appointments if we so choose. There was a lively discussion on this subject. A non-binding straw vote was taken and showed a 5-4 majority in favor of making this change. Discussion to be continued at a later meeting.

Town Manager Form of Government

There was general agreement that Wilton is not ready for this change at this time. The individual opinions were:

- Ms. Gould – We have a very competent talent pool of individuals who can assume the First Selectman job.
- Mr. Burnham – no need to change now.
- Ms. Ayers – Professional management could deal with the many diverse issues now facing the town. Although perhaps not now, we are near to needing it. Certainly within the next ten years.
- Mr. Levene – In some larger towns, the town manager could be a way to overcome political corruption. We do not have that problem.
- Ms. Herot – The town manager proposal is based on the fantasy that an individual with enough degrees in professional management could better handle our challenges. Without Charter revision, if necessary, we could always hire an Administrative Assistant such as New Canaan and Darien has.
- Mr. Weldon – has personal experience in his previous town with trying to remove a City Manager, and it is difficult.
- Ms. Lee – has mixed feelings. Best to leave it as is in this time of turmoil. A town manager would be expensive.
- Mr. Kaelin – keep it as is.
- Mr. Russell – the CEO should be directly accountable to the voters. We have plenty of talent and experience available, and with the economic downturn, the talent pool may get larger.

Mr. Kaelin moved to retain the First Selectman position as under the current Charter.

Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Ms. Gould moved to go on record as being in favor of keeping the Town Meeting form of government if the First Selectman is kept as the CEO. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Ms. Herot moved to make the election of the First Selectman separate from election of the other members of the BOS. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Term Length for Selectmen

Another lively discussion ensued. No vote was taken at this time. The individual opinions were diverse.

Should the BOS and First Selectmen terms be four years? What about term lengths?

- Mr. Kaelin – Four years for both. No term limits for First Selectman, probably ok for BOS.
- Ms. Lee – prefers two year terms; it drives engagement.
- Mr. Weldon – still on the fence. Four years would be ok, but two years forces accountability. Can we get public comment on this? Term limits are good but maybe not for the First Selectman.
- Ms. Herot – is not ready to vote tonight but is leaning toward two year terms. Exempt the First Selectman from term limits.
- Mr. Levene – Four years for First Selectman, two years for BOS. Term limit for First Selectman probably not wise.
- Ms. Ayers – prefers four years for both with staggered terms for BOS. Term limits are good for the BOS but no for the First Selectman.
- Mr. Burnham – Two years for the First Selectman, with four years staggered for the BOS. He likes term limits for the BOS, not sure about the First Selectman.
- Ms. Gould – is conflicted. A four year term has benefits, especially for the First Selectman and probably the BOS as well.

➤ Mr. Russell – is leaning toward four year terms.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Robert Russell
Chairman

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