

## **CHARTER COMMISSION**

Robert Russell, Chairman  
Michael Kaelin, Vice Chairman



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TOWN HALL  
238 Danbury Road  
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## **CHARTER COMMISSION**

**December 9, 2008**

**Wilton Town Hall, Room B**

**PRESENT:** Robert Russell, Michael Kaelin, Alice Ayers, Marilyn Gould,  
Louise Herot, Toni Lee, Paul Burnham  
**ABSENT:** Doug Levene, Chris Weldon

**ALSO PRESENT:** First Selectman William Brennan, Finance Board Chairman Robert Kelso,  
Council on Ethics Chairman Steven Hudspeth, Nick Davatzes, John  
Kalamarides, Judy Zucker, Carole Kleinfeld, Jerry and Barbara Holdridge,  
Brian Shea (Bulletin), Lauren Mylo (Villager)

Chairman Russell called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Upon motion by Ms. Gould, the minutes of the November 25, 2008 were unanimously accepted as presented. (Ms. Lee abstained as she was not present on 11/25/08)

**Summarize Decisions To Date:** Mr. Russell advised that this commission has held 15 meetings prior to tonight. The commission members have agreed to the following:

- a) Change the Board of Education election procedure to be consistent with the way other boards and commissions are elected. It was suggested putting this amendment in Section C-60 "Board of Education Special Provisions".
- b) Retain the First Selectman position as under current Charter.
- c) Retain the Town Meeting form of government if the First Selectman position is retained as CEO.
- d) Make the election of the First Selectman separate from the election of other members of the Board of Selectmen.

### **Items for further discussion and/or public input:**

- a) Should the Selectmen make appointments for vacancies on the Board of Education and Board of Finance or continue to let those boards fill their own vacancies until the next election. Currently, if the boards do not fill a vacancy within 30 days, it reverts to the Selectmen.
- b) Four year term for First Selectman and Board of Selectmen? If four year terms, should the terms be staggered?
- c) The Board of Finance can reduce/increase individual items in the BOS budget but the BOE budget must be treated as a single line item by State law. Should the BOF be restricted so it can no longer make changes in line items in the BOS budget?
- d) Other relatively small changes to try to make the entire document easier to read and understand.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** Mr. Bob Kelso – feels that four year terms provide continuity. He also agrees with staggering, if terms are increased to four years. He suggested possibly having a sixth member – First Selectman and 5 Selectmen, the same number as the BOE and BOF. He also agrees with a separate election for the First Selectman. He would not like to see powers of the BOF taken away by not allowing line item authority in the BOS budget. This power was used to add funds to the Library Board because they made a compelling case to do so, although the Board of Selectmen did not agree.

Mr. Jerry Holdridge – In the budgetary process, he would like to see the capital budget for the school system divided from the overall capital budget to reflect the real cost of education. The school system is 75-78% of the total budget, but it is actually higher when you add the debt service and the things that town does for the schools. Even then, you wouldn't have a total picture but a better picture. Mr. Russell pointed out that this is not a Charter matter. Mr. Kelso advised that the Board of Finance has provided a pie chart indicating the portions of the debt service attributed to the schools. Mr. Holdridge feels the clause saying if there are less than 15% of the voters on the budget, it automatically passes, should be eliminated.

Ms. Barbara Holdridge – Owns property in Redding and has been voting on that budget, as well as in Wilton. People are shocked when she tells them how few people vote in Wilton, over two days. We are encouraging people not to vote. The last Redding budget was rejected twice before being approved. It is difficult to have a budget rejected in Wilton. She would also like to see term limits for the Board of Selectman.

First Selectman Bill Brennan – when people do not vote, they actually do vote. They vote by staying away. You can interpret it that they are comfortable with the budget presented or are not uncomfortable with any specific item. When we have had major issues, people come out and vote. School nurses are included in the Selectmen's budget, as well as other items that do not show up as debt service, so how do you compare with other towns when each one compares differently. We tend to talk about a 2/3 to 1/3 ratio but it is actually more than that for the school system.

Mr. Brennan is comfortable with either two or four year term lengths and totally agrees with the First Selectman being elected separately.

Mr. Nick Davatzes – feels odd year elections drive down participation and this is a big enough issue to lobby for a change to even years. He feels that people who do not show up are really a negative vote because he does not believe that people who do not vote are happy with what is going on.

Mr. Brennan feels that participation could be increased if the Annual Town Meeting is broadcast live on channel 79, allowing people to watch the meeting from home and once informed, come out to vote on Saturday.

Ms. Holdridge suggested having full presentations and hearings on the budget prior to the ATM and vote only on Tuesday (all day) yes or no with no ability to reduce budget numbers.

Ms. Judy Zucker believes a four year commitment is a very good idea. It would be helpful to reduce the time and energy spent on campaigning every two years. Since 1963, which was the first year with a five member Board of Selectmen, of 43 individuals, two people served less than two years; four served only one 2-year term; seven served more than two but less than four; 30 served four or more years. Of that 30 who served four years or more, eight served four years and 22 served more than four years.

Mr. Steve Hudspeth – has been attending meetings of the State Board of Ethics and hears comments from a number of towns, which has been eye-opening experience. The amount of conflicts, amount of concerns about not being heard, and amount of fear that leadership cannot be trusted [in other towns] is really quite staggering. We have to consider carefully before changing the system too much. The amount of detail given at the Town Meeting is helpful and the newspapers give plenty of information. People make a decision in their own lives – is it necessary for me to take the time to go out and vote based on what I know, what the issues are, and what my conclusions are. He doesn't condone making that decision that it is not worth the time, but people make a rational decision based on the information they have.

Mr. Brennan - If you have a competent person, you don't need two years to learn the job. In a corporate job, you get about 90 days.

Ms. Carole Kleinfeld – this meeting should have been broadcast on channel 79. If we are talking about trying to reach voters and inform the electorate, we should be broadcasting budget meetings, P&Z meetings, BOS meetings and Charter Commission meetings.

Ms. John Kalamarides – is disappointed that there aren't more people here telling the Charter Commission what they think. Anything that would change the structure of our government and would make it easier to knock down the budget several times, would be a concern, especially after the time that the BOS and BOE put into preparing the budget. Early on, he had said that he wanted to see a paid Town Manager and still feels that way. He believes the First Selectman should no longer be a paid position. He likes four year terms for the Selectmen as well.

Mr. Davatzes – suggested four year terms for the First Selectman and two year terms for the Board of Selectmen. There would still be checks and balances to the BOS because the members would be running every two years. The First Selectman election could then be more focused and possibly have a higher turnout of voters.

Regarding the requirement for 50 signatures to petition for a special town meeting, Ms. Holdridge likes the idea of using a percentage of the voters – as the population grows, the number of signatures required grows.

Charter Commission members thanked those who attended tonight to give their comments. The Commission is required to hold a formal public hearing after the first draft is completed but hearing comments tonight was very helpful.

The next meeting will be held on December 16 in Room A (Annex) at 7:00 p.m.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Jan Andras  
Recording Secretary  
(minutes taken from audio recording)