

CHARTER COMMISSION

Robert Russell, Chairman
Michael Kaelin, Vice Chairman



Telephone (203) 563-0102
Fax (203) 563-0299

TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, CT 06897

CHARTER COMMISSION
April 30, 2009
Wilton Town Hall, Room B

PRESENT: Robert Russell, Louise Herot, Toni Lee, Marilyn Gould, Chris Weldon, Paul Burnham, Mike Kaelin

ABSENT: Doug Levene, Alice Ayers

GUEST: First Selectman William Brennan

Chairman Russell called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m. in Meeting Room B.

Approval of Minutes: Will be approved at next meeting.

Review latest timeline

The draft report must be completed by May 15. The public hearing will then be held on 6/3/09.

Mr. Kaelin distributed draft copies of the Charter incorporating all recommendations from each of the three subcommittees into one document.

Group 2 – Finance, Budgets

Mr. Burnham has received more comments which will be incorporated into this section and brought to the next meeting for discussion and approval.

First Selectman Brennan asked to discuss the issue of line item authorization by the Board of Finance over the Board of Selectmen budget. He feels the policy should be comparable to the Board of Education, which accounts for 2/3 of the budget. The Board of Selectmen knows the budget better and knows where reductions can be managed when necessary. He served on the Board of Finance for five years and during that period, there was never a need to use the line item authority to reduce a particular line. The Board of Finance's job is to set the mill rate. Operations and management of the town is the responsibility of the Board of Selectmen. The BOF needs to watch ratios and balance the financial resources of the town, not discern what items are needed by departments. Eliminating line item

authority would eliminate the tendency for BOF members to micromanage and to encourage focus on the total budget.

Ms. Gould agreed. She believes it is good that the BOF can analyze the BOS and BOE budgets line-by-line and come up with questions. It concentrates the BOS or BOE to think about those things. She does not think that the BOF should be able to micromanage the BOS because they cannot do it to the BOE. They can suggest to the BOS and the First Selectman that they look at particular items but their primary responsibility is setting the total budget.

Mr. Kaelin views line item authority as financial control. Most people feel that more financial control is better. It is a tough sell to educate the general population as to how it really works between the BOS and BOF. He is worried that this issue would become the central focus of any proposed Charter revision and feels there would be an organized group in town that would want to fight the issue.

Mr. Weldon is concerned about taking away power from one group and putting too much power in one place. He feels that the system in place has worked well. It encourages people to look at things closer than they might otherwise.

Mr. Burnham pointed out that the BOF could eliminate a line item in the budget, i.e. the Teen Center, which would be a policy decision. The Town Meeting has line item authority. The BOS would be answering to the voters.

The discussion of the issue of line item authority continued at length. To date, this has been the only issue that does not have majority agreement. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Brennan advised that he will make arrangements for a telecast of the public hearing on June 3 and left the meeting.

Ms. Herot is concerned about the drafted wording that she feels seems to shift more legislative power to the Board of Finance.

For the next meeting, Mr. Burnham will attempt to define the word “appropriation” and clarify language in the Charter where this is used.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Jan Andras
Recording Clerk
(minutes taken from audio recording)