



Ellen O'Shaughnessy
Chairman

Mark Joyse
Vice Chairman

STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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John L. Daigle, Jr.
Bruce Fader
Robert Harvey
Dale Roberson
Michael Stupinski

Charter Revision Commission

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

MARCH 23, 2016

- MEMBERS PRESENT: Bruce Fader, Robert Harvey, Mark Joyse (Vice Chairman), Ellen O'Shaughnessy (Chairman), Dale Roberson, Michael Stupinski
- MEMBERS ABSENT: John L. Daigle, Jr.
- OTHERS PRESENT: Robert Clements; James Close; Mike Francis; Jack Hagopian; Kathy Hemmingway; Ricci Hirth; John Klimas; Evelyn Luginbuhl; Rudy Luginbuhl; Leo Miller, Selectman; Karen Neal; Rick Neal; Tom Palshaw, James Prichard, Selectman; Lori Spielman, First Selectman; Martin Spielman; Marylyn Spielman; Brian Tapur

Chairman O'Shaughnessy opened the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall Meeting Hall, 55 Main Street, Ellington, Connecticut. She read the legal notice of public hearing and introduced the members of the CRC.

Selectman Leo Miller stated that his concern applied to five-member boards in the Town of Ellington. According to Mr. Miller if the CRC does not stipulate minority representation on five-member boards than representation automatically accords to State Statute 9-167a, which stipulates that a five-member board can have four members from the majority party. He suggested that it would be a better idea to have a bare majority of three members from the majority party. He concluded by noting that a lone member minority might not even get a second of their motions. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy stated that the CRC had decided not to go forward with this revision.

Mr. Miller next suggested that there should be an automatic trigger for the budget to go directly to referendum rather than having the annual budget decided by town meeting; he noted this would allow the maximum number of people to vote on the budget. First Selectman Lori Spielman noted that seniors strongly suggest putting the budget to referendum. Mr. Miller recommended that the CRC use a cost of living adjustment (COLA) formula to define the trigger.

Robert Clements opposed automatically sending the annual budget to referendum. He said that the town meeting is where people ask questions and no one will go to the town meeting if they

know the budget is going to referendum. He advised that no one has their right to vote abridged except the few people who can't make it to the town meeting.

Mr. Clements spoke next on the CRC's recommendation to hire a Town Manager. He alluded to instances where, in other towns, the Town Manager had become a sort of dictator. He proposed that the CRC put in the Charter the ability to hire a Town Manager without the requirement of hiring a Town Administrator. He also stated that he preferred a Town Administrator to a Town Manager.

Mr. Clements spoke in opposition to the elimination of the Board of Finance. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy reminded Mr. Clements that the CRC had not recommended the elimination of the Board of Finance.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy told Mr. Clements that the job of First Selectman has become so large that hiring a Town Manager would split it into two jobs. Mr. Joyse said that the town would have a contract allowing them to dismiss the Town Manager at any time. Mr. Clements worried that unions would deter that ability. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy reminded Mr. Clements that the job is non-union. Mr. Clements said there is no way to fire a Town Manager in two years. Mr. Harvey disagreed; Mr. Roberson did not disagree.

Rudy Luginbuhl asked if there were goals and objectives that are going to be given to the Town Manager or if the Charter is the goals and objectives. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said that question would be up to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and the contract they write. She reminded the audience that a Town Manager is non-political and is charged with whatever the BOS charges him with. Mr. Fader agreed with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. Mr. Roberson compared the powers and salary of a Town Manager with the powers and salary of the Superintendent of Schools.

Mr. Roberson advocated for hiring a Town Administrator; he said a Town Administrator augments but does not supplant the role of the First Selectman. He believed that the Town of Ellington was not ready to give up control to a Town Manager. Mr. Fader noted that the CRC had been working hard to balance the competing ideas of a Town Manager versus a Town Administrator.

Selectman James Prichard asked why the Town Manager wasn't mentioned in the legal notice of public hearing. He said more people would have come out to the public hearing if that piece of information had been included in the notice. Mr. Fader said a public notice should be general in nature. Mr. Prichard said that lots of people don't have as much trouble with a Town Administrator.

Mike Francis said that the CRC is taking the vote and power in town away from the people. He believed that if department heads did their jobs a Town Manager would not be necessary.

Kathy Hemmingway asked if the appointment of a Town Manager would do away with the Finance Office and the Director of Finance. She noted that there would be an additional salary that would have to be accounted for. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy responded that town managers are adept at searching for grants and have secured millions in grants in other towns.

Mr. Francis opposed creating a position to make other people's jobs easier.

Ricci Hirth said his recall is his vote and he doesn't have a vote on the Town Manager. He asked what the town's bond rating is. The CRC replied that it was excellent. Mr. Fader recalled

that he brought up the bond rating as a possible performance review for a Town Manager. Mr. Hirth was angry that control of the town would be taken out of the public's hands. Mr. Harvey said that in order to get the best CEO of the town they are asking the BOS to hire a professional manager. Mr. Hirth suggested that town governance is no more complex than it was in the year 1900 and that the budget is increased by adding layers such as a Town Manager. Mr. Francis asked how hiring a Town Manager will save money. Mr. Harvey responded that town managers are skilled at getting grants. Mr. Francis said all the grants are online.

John Klimas wants Ellington run like a town, not a city. He said that the Town Manager would not help the First Selectman as much as an administrative assistant would. He noted that there are disadvantages to grants. He worried about the State's finances and taxes rising. He wants to keep Ellington a small town managed efficiently. He concluded by saying that the First Selectman should have input on what kind of position is created. Mr. Fader responded that all members of the CRC are advocating at least a Town Administrator because of the learning curve for new first selectmen.

James Close asked what the difference in professional level is between a Town Administrator and a Town Manager. Mr. Roberson replied that both would have similar educational credentials. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy replied that a Town Manager is hired by the BOS while a Town Administrator is hired by the First Selectman. Mr. Joyse replied that there is a disparity in pay between the positions.

Mr. Close asked if a Town Manager has more financial knowledge and would a Town Administrator be able to seek grants. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy replied that the First Selectman can delegate grant seeking to the Town Administrator. Mr. Harvey imagined that a Town Manager coming to Ellington would be on the more experienced side.

Mr. Close stated his preference for a Town Administrator – he saw no problem in need of the solution of a Town Manager.

Jack Hagopian asked for specific examples of things that have gone awry and asked the cost of the Town Manager position. Mr. Roberson replied that it would be about \$200,000, the same as the Superintendent of Schools.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy suggested that the artificial turf field and lighting grant for Ellington High School might have been handled well by a Town Manager because a lot of information did not transfer from the Blanchette Administration to the Spielman Administration. The First Selectman recalled how she learned of the grant.

The First Selectman said she didn't see what more a Town Manager could do for Ellington than is already being done. She also voiced opposition to bringing in an outsider who knows nothing about Ellington.

Mr. Clements said with the people in place in positions of power in Ellington the town could run efficiently even with a poor first selectman. He said the CRC has a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Mr. Fader replied that the CRC was trying to take a professional attitude and see what needs to be added to the government to make it better. Mr. Clements again noted that there was no problem and if there was the First Selectman could hire someone. He asked what kind of access the public would have to a Town Manager. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy replied that she never had a problem talking to Town Managers she researched and said they are just as accessible as first selectmen.

Mr. Francis asked if there is someone in Ellington who could fill the First Selectman's shoes. Mr. Stupinski replied that they were not likely to find a candidate for Town Manager within Ellington.

Mr. Francis considered the position of Town Manager undemocratic. Mr. Stupinski replied that the people vote for the selectmen and the selectmen hire the Town Manager.

Mr. Roberson indicated that one problem with a professional manager is that they serve under contract – the problem being that firing a professional manager typically involves litigation or buying them out of their contract. Mr. Fader replied that nine times out of 10 a settlement is negotiated.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy noted that not having a Town Manager reduces institutional memory and delays important matters. Mr. Stupinski asked what grants has the town missed out on over the past five years because they didn't know about them. Mr. Joyse noted that the CRC is looking at the Ellington's growth a few years out and what the town will need then.

Mr. Palshaw asked if the Chairman would share her experiences with the three town managers that she shared at the last CRC meeting. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy discussed her research into three towns with a Board of Selectman and a Town Manager; Hebron, Tolland and Granby. She recalled that the Town Manager of Hebron has secured grants totaling millions of dollars and that the bond rating of Hebron has improved under a Town Manager. According to O'Shaughnessy the Town Manager of Tolland cited efficiencies, grants, and legal actions as the advantages of having a Town Manager. Tolland's bond rating has also improved under the Town Manager and the Town Manager has lowered Tolland's health care costs. She noted that the Town Manager in Winchester discovered embezzlement by that town's former finance manager.

Mr. Prichard asked if the CRC was considering paying both the Town Manager and the First Selectman. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said they are recommending hiring a Town Manager and that it is up to the BOS to decide details such as that.

Rick Neal asked who started the idea of having a Town Manager. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy replied that the last First Selectman suggested it. Mr. Neal said grants come from the state which comes out of his taxes. He said that by electing the BOS and the First Selectman the town has checks and balances.

Mr. Neal asked if the CRC had encountered towns with bad Town Managers. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said she hadn't found any. Mr. Roberson said there was a case in Saugus, Massachusetts. Mr. Stupinski said it happens.

Mr. Hirth recommended against hiring a Town Manager.

Mr. Klimas asked if there was a hybrid position that could be looked at instead of the Town Manager. Mr. Roberson believed the Town Administrator was the hybrid position he was looking for.

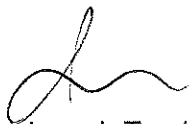
Mr. Klimas asked if Mr. Stupinski could have done a better job with a Town Manager when he was First Selectman. Mr. Stupinski replied that he could have done a better job with a Town Manager.

Mr. Clements agreed with Mr. Roberson and said the Town Administrator could become a Town Manager if the need arises.

Mr. Hirth thanked the CRC for all their hard work and everything they've done.

Hearing no further comments, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy closed the public hearing at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph Tarzi
Recording Secretary