

**TOWN OF CROMWELL
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
41 WEST STREET, CROMWELL, CT 06416
April 27, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Present: Chairperson Jennifer Lepore, Mike Cannata, Phil Gagnon, Ann Grasso, Lou Menendez, Geoff Oryell, and Marie Roberto.

Also Present: Town Manager Anthony Salvatore, and Town Attorney Kari Olson

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Jennifer Lepore called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairperson Lepore suggested making a motion to approve the April 20, 2022 Regular meeting minutes. Motion by Mike Cannata. Ann Grasso noted that in section D "Town Clerk" should be "Town Council." All approved of such amendment. Ann Grasso seconded. All in favor. *Motion carried.*

C. Approval of Agenda

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ed Maley, 4 Shawnee Court. Mr. Maley began with noting that he is a former member of the Charter Revision Commission. He commented that he believes, as a member of the Board of Finance, that it works well and is grounded in history. He noted that budgetary activity is a large part of town governance. He suggested that the Town Council would be overloaded if the Board of Finance was eliminated. He noted that in larger towns and cities with larger legislative bodies, the town council and Board of Finance functions are combined.

Brian Stermer. New member of the Board of Finance

E. NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of Section 5.06. Marie Roberto asked Mr. Maley about accountability of the Board of Finance to the Town Council and whether the town council has veto power over the budget. Mr. Maley responded that the Board of Finance and Town Council have separate functions. The Board of Finance makes the final decisions for the town and Board of Education. The Town Manager and Superintendent of the schools present budgets to the Board of Finance. Prior to going to the voters, the Board of Finance has the final say in the budget. Marie then asked how voters hold the Board of Finance accountable other than voting them out of office. Mr. Maley responded that it is exactly the same as the

process for Town Council and any other public official. Town finances are handled by the town manager and director of finance. Towns are not permitted to impeach members because the Connecticut General Statutes prohibit it. Mike Cannata asked about the process of the budget and the communication between the Board of Finance and the Town Council. Mr. Maley noted there is no formal process regarding communication but there is informal communication. The defense of the budget is left to the Town Manager. Ann Grasso presented an example of the Town Council authorizing \$2,000 for a town organization and the organization only received \$1,000 without explanation. Ann noted that the Board of Finance seemed to remain over the Town Council. Ann would prefer a 4-year term and wishes there was a way to require qualifications for the Board of Finance members. Geoff Oryell asked Mr. Maley why there is a six-year term versus a four-year term. Mr. Maley noted that the original statute provided for a six-year term but in 1981 or 1982, municipalities gained ability to change the term. Mr. Maley is in favor of six-year terms. Attorney Olsen noted that the Board of Finance statutes envision a Board of Selectmen form of government without a charter. Mr. Gagnon asked Mr. Maley whether there is anything in the Connecticut General Statutes that state that the Board of Finance sets the mill rate. Mr. Maley noted that after the referendum, the Board of Finance sets the mill rate, but the Town Council can do it. The Town Manager then stated that he does not think a vote on bonded debt should occur every year, just the Board of Education and town budget. Mr. Maley responded that in state government, there is a line item for the budget, but we are still legally obligated to pay the bonded debt even if voted down. Mr. Gagnon asked Mr. Maley whether the Board of Finance has outgrown its use to make it duplicative. Mr. Maley responded that no, it had not. It comes down to democracy, by keeping the Board of Finance, people have more opportunity to voice their opinion regarding the budget. Mr. Maley noted that one must worry about whether one person becomes too powerful which is why we have a bicameral legislature, but we do not have that at the town level, but the bicameral spirit is present in the budget process by keeping the Board of Finance. Mr. Stermer stated that he agreed with Mr. Maley and the town is better served with two sets of eyes on things. He was impressed with the amount of time the Board of Finance spends on reviewing the budget. Mr. Gagnon asked whether a subcommittee of the town council would serve the same purpose. Mr. Stermer noted that that could be another way to do this. Julius Neto, a former Board of Finance Member, commented that he agreed with Mr. Maley's position. Mr. Neto stated that a different set of eyes is helpful, and the Board of Finance group is not tied politically as much to the town, so they are able to make necessary decisions. The Town Council must focus on many different things, but the Board of Finance is solely focused on affordability and fiscal implications. Mr. Neto thought that keeping the Board of Finance in place allows for checks and balances.

Chairperson Lepore called a recess at 8:18 PM. Meeting reconvened at 8:27 PM.

Discussion of Section 5.02. Chairperson Lepore polled the Commission members on their positions to retain the Board of Finance. The consensus was to retain the Board. Chairperson Lepore then asked for the members' opinions regarding the term for the

Board of Finance. The consensus was to change the term from six years to four years. Further discussion commenced on the composition of the board and whether it should have 5, 6, or 7 members. Mr. Gagnon noted that it was very difficult to get consensus with an even number of members. Attorney Olsen noted that while the statute says six members, we are able to change it via the charter. The consensus was to change the composition of the Board of Finance from six members to five members. Term limits were discussed. Ms. Roberto expressed a desire for a two consecutive term limit. However, a majority of the board disagreed, and no term limit was imposed. Lastly, Chairperson Lepore asked the Commission members whether they were in favor of staggered terms as is present in the current charter. The majority of the members preferred to keep staggered terms. The Town Attorney will create some scenarios to show how the staggered terms would work in the future election cycles assuming we have 4 year terms and 5 members. The Town Attorney will also review the possibility of increasing the membership to 7 members.

F. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Lou Menendez and seconded by Mike Cannata. Meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM. All in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Lepore
Chairperson