

CITY OF STAMFORD 19TH CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FINANCE COMMITTEE

Shelley Michelson, Chair

Members

Susan Halpern
Steven Kolenberg
Alex Martinez
Clemon Williams

MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, September 7, 2022

7:00 PM

This meeting was conducted remotely

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM. In attendance were Commissioners Halpern, Kolenberg, Martinez, Williams and Michelson. Also present as observers were Commissioners Lane and Pramberger. Our guest interviewee was Sandy Dennies, Director of Administration.

Ms. Dennies gave us a history of her budgetary experience which included extensive knowledge of grant writing. She maintains close contact with the grants office when assembling the fiscal year operating and capital budgets. She outlined the capabilities of a new highly secure Cloud-based Oracle computer system that is currently in the testing phase and will go live for financial accounting on January 1, 2023. The system will have a geographic component to pinpoint the location of capital projects and will display the project costs. The system will streamline the approval process by segmenting necessary sign-offs, automatically routing approvals to the next person in the chain.

The mill rate may include a tax rate up to 4 mills for the capital non-recurring fund. The City's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report includes audits of both the City side and the Board of Education ("BOE"). The question was asked as to why the Mayor does not sit on the BOE as a voting member since the Board of Education budget is more than 50% of the overall budget and the answer was that this arrangement was most likely a State Statute issue. Commissioner Martinez raised the issue of the Board of Education's frequent transfers among line items and suggested that these transfers be subject to additional scrutiny since the auditor probably does not focus on the appropriateness of these transfers. Commissioner Martinez also raised the prospect of financial consolidation of the golf courses. Ms. Dennies believed that such a consolidation would be difficult, but not impossible to achieve. When asked whether she believed that consolidation of the Fire and Police Pension Plans would be prudent, she agreed with Al Cava, Director of Human Resources that such a combination could result in better selection of financial advisors, boosting returns, increasing investment choices and improving funding levels. **These last two items could be voted on by the Committee as potential changes to the Charter.** We were informed that, unlike City side grants, the BOE's grants do not go through the regular appropriation process.

Below are Ms. Dennies responses to Finance Committee charges:

Charge #23 *Add a section permitting the Town Clerk to request funding, if necessary, from the Board of Finance*-This provision is unnecessary since the budget of the Town Clerk has not been restricted and the office receives funds annually from the State for document preservation.

Charge #73 *Develop a biennial budget similar to the State of Connecticut* – Ms. Dennies is in favor of a biennial budget for both the City and BOE portions of the budget as a result of the immense amount of annual preparation required by her department as well as all the City departments preparing both operating and capital budgets. If and when necessary, the out year of the budget could be modified. The Land Use Committee heard this same suggestion from Ms. Theresa Dell, Chair of the Planning Board. **The Committee may vote on recommending this issue as a charge worthy of serious consideration.**

Charge #74 *Consider having the BOE budget process earlier to allow earlier hiring of teachers* – Ms. Dennies did not believe this change to be necessary as she felt that the Board of Education had ample time over the summer to recruit and hire educators and administrators. The BOE has felt that perhaps Stamford was not able to attract the most qualified talent since other municipalities had the option to begin hiring earlier in the cycle

Charges #75, 76 and 77 – *increasing public scrutiny, digital checkbook, increasing public input into capital budget process, including participatory budgeting* – Ms. Dennies was not in favor of any of these ideas. She believes that The Office of Policy and Management releases a quarterly report identifying any shortfalls which reports are available to the public. Commissioner Kolenberg offered to research the success of participatory budgeting in other communities, Participatory budgeting requires a city to set aside a small amount of funds which selected community groups might use for specific community benefit purposes after a vetting process.

Charge #78 *Consider giving the BOR the ability to increase any item in the budget* – under legal advisement

Charge #79 *Consider allowing Board of Representatives (“BOR”) authority to restore a budget cut by the Board of Finance (“BOF”) by a 2/3 vote of body* – under legal advisement

Charge #80 *Fixing of Tax Rates – review-* Ms. Dennies proposed the elimination of a separate calculation for fire which will have no effect on the tax rates.

Charge #81: *Tax for Sanitation* –review - taxes for trash pickup and for recycling are more complex based on which dwellings are eligible for both.

Charge #82: *Bonds, Consider adding a requirement that the City show a consolidating debt service schedule so that investors, residents and the public can see clearly how much principal and interest the City is required to pay annually and adding a requirement of more detailed listing of material litigation for more transparency and to position Stamford in line with what other similar sized cities report* - Ms. Dennis indicated that she would make the debt service more transparent in Stamford’s bond offering documents and indicated that the material litigation question would be in the purview of corporation counsel

Charge 83: *Additional Appropriations* – review – difficult process must go through BOF and BOR.

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Commissioner Martinez and seconded by Commissioner Kolenberg. The minutes were accepted by the remaining commissioners with abstentions by Commissioners Williams and Kolenberg who were either not present for the meeting or attended only a portion of the meeting.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Martinez and seconded by Commissioner Halpern. After unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Commissioner Michelson

This meeting is available on [video](#).