

CITY OF STAMFORD 19TH CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FINANCE COMMITTEE

Shelley Michelson, Chair

Members

Susan Halpern
Steven Kolenberg
Alex Martinez
Clemon Williams

MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, November 2, 2022
7:00 P.M.

This meeting was conducted remotely

Guest Attendees:

Representative Monica DiCostanzo
Representative Lindsey Miller

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 P.M. In addition to our guests, Representatives Monica DiCostanzo and Lindsay Miller, Co-Chairs of the Board of Representatives' Fiscal Committee, in attendance were Commissioners Halpern, Martinez and Williams. Commissioner Kolenberg was absent.

Neither Representative DiCostanzo nor Representative Miller was in favor of restoration of BOF budget cuts by the BOR (Charge #,79) It was pointed out that the BOF frequently restored budget cuts made by the BOR during the fiscal year. The ability of the BOR to increase the budget (Charge # 78) may not be permitted statutorily.

Much of the meeting centered around both Representatives' beliefs that the budget discussion should begin earlier with involvement of the BOR via a pre-budget collaboration, specifically with regular updates from the BOE. In response to several charge items related to public participation in the budgetary process (Charge #s 76,77,111), Representative DiCostanzo proposed listening sessions during the spring for the capital budget with the Planning Board and in the fall in which the Mayor's office and boards (Board of Finance, Board of Representatives and Board of Education) could allow public input into the budgetary process. There are few participants at the joint BOF/BOR public hearing late in the budgetary process and Representative DiCostanzo suggested that the Neighborhood Associations become involved in the budgetary process by reaching out to the various departments.

Commissioner Williams raised the issue of chronic underbudgeting for construction projects, mentioning specifically the Strawberry Hill School and both Representatives agreed that it was a perpetual problem at the BOE resulting from poor cost analyses. Overestimation also exists in the overall budget and the unused funds are frequently "re-purposed." Representative DiCostanzo mentioned that the Planning Board was looking to tighten up its oversight of the use of project

funds with mechanisms for that oversight now in place. The Representatives mentioned that, in general, departments are loath to ask for the actual costs of needed capital items. It was felt by many BOR members that the BOR should have had more input into the use of the American Rescue Plan Funds. Finally, it was felt that the Safe Debt Limit was a number that was designed to replace the principal of the debt that was paid off during the prior fiscal year and that we are extremely behind in our capital investments. The scarce allocation of capital dollars is designed to limit annual property tax increases. *With the recent change by the State in the repayment term of General Obligation borrowing from 20 to 30 years, the City could increase its capital bonding budget for projects with long average useful lives.*

Information on BOE expenditures and movement of funds should be subject to more scrutiny according to the Representatives. The BOE also has a Fiscal Committee and a Controller. It was recommended by Representative DiCostanzo that the BOE could use a CPA and should be subject to outside detailed audits with cooperation between internal and external auditors.

According to the Representatives, the new computer system will foster more transparency, leading to better decision-making, allowing BOR members to access invoices and transaction level detail without having to go to OPM. Transparency with contracts was cited as a particular problem.

The Representatives' feelings on the subject of biennial budgeting (Charge #73) leaned towards annual budgets, pointing out both the time-consuming nature of annual budgets and the perennial problem of departments' difficulties managing to their respective budgets, a problem that would be exacerbated with biennial budgeting. They were optimistic that the new accounting system would make budget adherence easier.

Both Representatives feel that consolidation of City grants under one office would be economical, as the Community Development Block Grants, administered separately, are thought not to have strong controls. *The question remains as to whether the BOE grants can be consolidated into the same budget office.* In response to Anita Carpenter's concerns about grants that have been rejected by the BOF, the Representatives surmised that this happens infrequently and occurs when insufficient information is provided or if the City contribution is deemed to be too large. Better communication is needed between the Grants Office and the approval boards before formal grant presentations are made.

Representative DiCostanzo was in favor of re-directing the Sterling rental payment to Brennan to be put towards its capital needs and believes it could be accomplished administratively by resolution.

Both representatives believe that the pension funds need attention and that the pension trustees are not managing the funds well, a criticism the Committee also heard from BOF Chairman Freedman. Representative Miller favors some consolidation and Representative DiCostanzo suggested that a task force be appointed to study the issue.

With respect to charge #23 and correspondence from the Town Clerk's office to the Charter Revision Commission, it was suggested that the Committee review the State Statutes to ascertain the functions of the Town Clerk and amend Section C4-10-1 as needed.

The minutes from the October 27th meeting were approved via a motion made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Martinez with approval of Commissioner Michelson. Commissioner Halpern was excused from that meeting, so abstained from the vote.

Commissioner Michelson raised as Other Business the correspondence from the Town Clerk with the suggestion that this item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the entire Charter Commission. Commissioner Michelson contacted Co-Chair Lombardo and asked him to place the item on the agenda.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Halpern and seconded by Commissioner Williams. With unanimous consent, the meeting was adjourned at 8:52 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Commissioner Michelson

This meeting is on [video](#)