

CITY OF STAMFORD 19TH CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FINANCE COMMITTEE

Shelley Michelson, Chair

Members

Susan Halpern
Steven Kolenberg
Alex Martinez
Clemon Williams

MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, February 1, 2023
7:00 P.M.

LEGEND

Red: Do not pursue

Green: Recommend for approval

Yellow: More Information required

Blue: Leave as recommendation to BOR

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 P.M. In attendance were Commissioners Halpern, Martinez, Michelson, Bowser and Lane. Commissioner Williams joined the meeting at 8:01 P.M. Commissioner Kolenberg had reported a conflict of interest and was excused from attending the meeting.

The Committee continued to review the Charges and additional suggestions that have been submitted and members present agreed unanimously on the following items which will be submitted to the full Commission for a vote:

- **Charge #23, Section C4-10-1:** Add section permitting the Town Clerk to request funding if deemed necessary from the BOF: *The Committee decided not to pursue this Charge since the budget process for the Town Clerk's office is the same as other departments and additional funding could be requested, if necessary*
- **Charge #72, C7-10-8:** Review whether this section is applicable: *The Committee decided not to pursue this Charge since the Section is clearly necessary as it creates the Police and Fire Pension Funds*
- **Charge #s 75,76,77,111 (Charter Sections C-20-5, C8-30-9:** Increasing public scrutiny and input, e.g., a digital checkbook or participatory budgeting. Consider increasing public input into the capital budget process and including participatory budgeting as part of that process, consider making the budget process more inclusive of resident involvement (i.e., Participatory budgeting and provide longer notice of Public Hearing) – *the Committee suggested that a public hearing involving the capital and operating budget be scheduled each September to allow resident input into the budgetary process before the budget is formed. In this regard, the language of required*

reports furnished by Attorney Mednick should be considered and Section C8-20-5 should be amended to permit public participation at Planning Board public meetings

- **Charge #s78, 110 and 79: (C8-30-7, C8-30-2):** Consider allowing the Board of Representatives the ability to increase any item in the budget; Charge 79: consider allowing the Board of Representatives to restore a budget cut by 2/3 vote of the entire Board . **The Committee decided not to pursue Charges #78 and 110, as if was felt that adding to the budget would interfere with the timing of the budget, however, based on the opinion of Attorney Mednick, who opined that State Statutes do not prohibit alterations in the relations between the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives. the Committee voted to put forth Charge #79, which would allow the Board of Representatives, with a 2/3 vote of the entire Board, to restore a budget cut by the BOF, since the BOR is closer to the residents who would be affected by budget cuts**
- **Charge #80 (C8-30-10) Fixing of Tax Rates:** **The Committee reviewed this section and determined that no action was necessary as the rates took into account all items necessary to set the mill rate and provided for additional taxation in the event of miscalculation**
- **Charge #81 (C80-40-5) Review of Tax for Sanitation –** **The Committee deferred a recommendation on this Charge pending discussions with WPCA and the assessor's office to gather additional information**
- **Charge 82 (Charter 8-30-2(b)4, C5-20-3:** Show consolidating debt service schedule on all debt and make transparent all material litigation on Stamford's website and on bond offerings . *Our discussion focused on outstanding claims and a threshold of \$50,000 for materiality, The City's legal office may have the IT resources to make this available. We also decided to recommend that publication of the costs of litigation should be available to city residents.*
- **Charge #83: (C8-20-9, C8-30-12, c8-20-7)** Approval requirements for increasing capital projects, additional appropriations **The Committee decided not to pursue this Charge since 2/3 vote of the BOF and the BOR are required for increasing the capital budget together with a positive advisory opinion from the PB**
- **Golf Commission/Golf Authority** **The Commission will meet with the executive management of the Brennan course and the grounds superintendent to ascertain Brennan's capital needs and will thereafter work with Attorney Mednick to propose some language. No merger of the courses is contemplated.**
- **Grants Office:** **The Committee felt that there could be some efficiencies in the operation of the Grant Office if the Community Development Grants office would be subsumed under the City's Grants Office, but will propose that this idea be posed as a recommendation to the Board of Representatives and that it be considered as an Ordinance rather than a revision to the Charter**
- **Close out of Capital Projects:** The suggestion was submitted by Dr.Sinani, Director of OPM. It deletes the approval authority of the Planning Board, the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives, leaving the authority solely to the Mayor. **The Committee decided not to pursue this suggestion, as this decision should require more review than just that of the Mayor.**
- **Control of Appropriations: (Section 8-30-11)** This suggestion was submitted by Dr.Sinani and would effectively change operating category approval from line items to programs and increase the amounts and/or percentages subject to approval **The Committee decided not to pursue this suggestion as it would result in less budget item scrutiny at a time when every dollar spent in Stamford is scarce and crucial.**
- **Charges 69, 70 and 71, all relating to pension best practices and pension advisors will be reviewed after the Committee has heard from pension experts. Commissioner Williams has volunteered to draft language for the Charter relating to the creation of the defined contribution pension plan.**

- **Section C6-20-9 Power of Investigation:** *Incorporate language to augment ability to require departmental audits. (language to be supplied by Attorney Mednick).*

Other items discussed include

1. *requesting language to be inserted into the budgetary process to allow a public hearing in September to allow residents to provide input into the capital and operating budgets before the budgetary process begins. The meeting should be attended by the Mayor, the Superintendent of Schools, the Planning Board, the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives. Public Hearings shall take place also after preliminary budgets have been presented by the Mayor and the Planning Board. Appropriate language can be drafted by Attorney Mednick.*
2. *Based on Commission approval, insertion of approved language from Attorney Mednick regarding cooperation in the budget process, document sharing, ethics can be inserted in the appropriate sections(s) of the Charter.*
3. *Replace the word **may** with **shall** in Section C6-10-2 in two places requiring the Board of Education to keep fiscal control records.*

A motion was made by Commissioner Martinez to approve the draft meeting notes from the meeting of January 19, 2023. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Halpern and with unanimous approval, the minutes were accepted. There being no other business, Commissioner Halpern made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Martinez seconded the motion. After unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Commissioner Michelson

This meeting is on [video](#).