

**CITY OF NORWALK
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND VIA ZOOM
MAY 24, 2023**

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ATTENDANCE: Patsy Brescia, Chair; Richard McQuaid Vice Chair; Carl Dickens;
Tyler Fairbairn; Benita Watford Raleigh; Michael Witherspoon;
Angela Wasunna (6:39 p.m.)

OTHERS: Attorney Steven Mednick Counsel to the Commission

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Brescia called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Brescia called the Roll as indicated above.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Regular Meeting: May 11, 2023

**** MR. DICKENS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED
** MS. WATFORD RALEIGH SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Mr. Alex Knopp asked when a recommendation will be made about what form the Charter Revision will be presented to the public and who will make that decision. Mr. Mednick explained that the Commission is voting on the draft tonight and on June 2nd will submit the Charter to the Common Council. He said changes will be explained and he will draft a letter for Ms. Brescia's signature. Ultimately, what is on the ballot will be up to the Common Council to resolve.

Mr. Mednick explained that the Commission will send a draft report to the Common Council and the Common Council will set up a series of meetings where the Commission will make a presentation. If the Common Council has no recommendations, then they can state within 45 days that they accept the report as a final report. They will then vote on the Charter. Once they have an approved document, they will develop questions for the ballot.

Mr. Mednick said that in his experience, there are bound to be questions and recommendations. The Commission would then reconvene to work on those recommendations. Once they get the final report, they will vote sometime in August and then develop questions for the November ballot.

Mr. Knopp suggested having the changes to the Mayor's term listed separately, so the entire work of the Commission is not put at risk.

Ms. Wasunna joined the meeting at 6:39 p.m.

Mayor Knopp recommended making a political judgement if there is a controversial issue. He said he knows the required public hearings for this Commission ended, but asked if there will be opportunities to make recommendations. Mr. Mednick explained that the Common Council has

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a statutory public hearing near the end of deliberations and they will begin developing their recommendations. The public will be able to comment on the document and the recommendations.

The public hearing will be an opportunity for everyone to testify. The public document will include the list of substantive changes.

Mr. Knopp said he was not in favor of a four year term for Mayor and noted that the term of Mayor was a substantive change.

Ms. Diane Cece thanked the Commissioners for their hard work and for the three page recap of changes. She said she was opposed to the four year mayoral term and is concerned about how the questions will be relayed on the ballot. She said that early on she was a proponent of increasing the number of people on the Police Commission but most of the agenda items have to do with tuition reimbursements et cetera and are not substantive. They need to look at what the role of the police Commission is. She added that they should also consider a Citizen's Review Board. Ms. Brescia said that was not addressed.

Nicole (did not state her last name) asked about the question on the ballot to move the Mayor to a four year term. She also asked if there is a reason why Planning and Zoning are not elected. Ms. Brescia explained that the Board of Education and Common Council are elected. All the others are not elected. They are recommended by the Mayor for Common Council approval, including the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

IV. LIBERATIONS OF THE COMMISSION PERTAINING TO TRANSMITTAL OF THE DRAFT REPORT TO THE COMMON COUNCIL

Mr. Mednick shared his screen and reviewed the major changes to the 2023 revised Charter. He said that by Friday or at the latest, Monday, he would send his final mark up to the Commissioners. He asked everyone to take one last look at the document.

Mr. McQuaid said the biggest question is the four year term for Mayor. He asked to move it to 2027. He said this would allow people to look at all the work that has been done on the Charter Revision. He added that he would hate to see it crash and burn over the four year term.

Mr. Dickens said he received five calls last week and the comments were about the Mayoral term. He suggested moving it because if it stays in the document, it will be voted down.

Mr. Fairbairn said he has not been lobbied by anyone to do a four year term. When it first came up it was "best practice". It is not a power grab. He said a four year Mayoral term has a lot of benefits, but if people do not want it, it will not hurt his feelings. He suggested if the Commission is going to bump it out that they take it out of the Cr and perhaps add a

recommendation for when the Charter Commission revisits this next time. He said he shares Mr. McQuaid's concern that all of the work will suffer because people are concerned about the four year term.

Ms. Brescia said she had had the opposite response from people who want a four year term for Mayor and the Common Council. She said the intent of the Commission was for this to be a separate item. She said she is looking at this from a business and governance position and to have leadership take on projects within a four year term instead of two years.

Ms. Brescia said the Common Council has the option to make changes and said she recalls that several people were in favor of a four year term.

Ms. Watford Raleigh said she has not heard a reason why people do not want a four year term. Mr. Dickens said the calls he received were political because of the minority party not having elected leadership. He said he agreed with Ms. Brescia and this was deliberated at length. It is designed for a business viewpoint to get things done. He said his concern is that if it stays as a bundled vote, the Charter will fail.

Mr. Mednick said that if the Common Council approves the four year term, then can include it as a separate question. Mr. Fairbairn said that it was clear from the beginning that this would be a separate vote. He said his concern is that the people who are opposed to the four year term would make it their mission to tank this.

Mr. Dickens said that people will need to understand these are two different votes. He added that it was incumbent upon the Commission to deliver that message. Ms. Brescia said it was incumbent upon the Commission to deliver what is best for the City.

Mr. McQuaid said that he got a lot of comments from both sides. He said he looked at 2016 and there were not a lot of signs out to vote yes for the Charter.

Mr. Witherspoon said that in 2016 three out of the four questions were voted down.

Mr. Dickens suggested staying with the four years, but making it clear that it is a separate vote from the Charter. Mr. McQuaid suggested pushing the four year Mayoral term out to 2027. Mr. Dickens agreed. He said it is up to the Common Council to have a separate question.

**** MR. MCQUAID MOVED THE FOUR YEAR MAYORAL TERM WOULD COMMENCE ON JANUARY 1 2028 FOLLOWING THE 2027 ELECTION AND THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION RECOMMENDS A SEPARATE QUESTION ON THE BALLOT**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) VOTE IN OPPOSITION (MS. BRESCIA)**

Mr. Mednick reviewed the Police and Fire Commission section and said there is public support for more public oversight for both. He said the language on management and supervision comes from the State Statute. He added that areas such as suspension are governed by collective bargaining, which trumps the provision of the Charter. Ms. Brescia said they could make a suggestion that this be reviewed next time with the collective bargaining unit.

Mr. Mednick reviewed the section on the Duty of the Police to Arrest Without Warrant.

**** MS. WATFORD RALEIGH MOVED TO REMOVE THE DUTY OF THE POLICE TO ARREST WITHOUT WARRANT**
**** MS. WASUNNA SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Mednick reviewed the portion of the Charter that referenced the Taxing Districts. Ms. Brescia said it was important to go to all of the taxing district meetings.

Ms. Brescia asked if there is a Municipal Historian as referenced to on page 66. Mr. Mednick said it is in the Ordinance. Ms. Brescia said it is a popular subject in Norwalk. Mr. McQuaid said he would look into this.

**** MR. MCQUAID MOVED TO APPROVE THE CHARTER SUBJECT TO FURTHER EDITS AND COMMENTS BETWEEN THE COMMON COUNCIL AND THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**
**** MR. DICKENS SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Mednick said it has been a pleasure to work with this Commission and said there is still work to be done. Ms. Brescia told Mr. Mednick that he educated them and that she appreciated it.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services