

TOWN OF WESTERLY, RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC HEARING – AD-HOC ADVISORY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION – PUBLIC LIBRARY
SATURDAY – APRIL 9, 2016 – 9:00 A.M.

1. 9:10 A.M. CALL TO ORDER

Present: Lawrence Cioppa, Chair
Chris Lawlor, Filer
James Angelo
Richard Dudley
John Formica
Christian Lund
Nina Rossomando
Paula Ruisi
Stephen Turano

Also Present: Benjamin Delaney, Recording Secretary

2. 9:10 A.M. PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Cioppa summarized the purpose of the Commission and Town Charter and the procedure for Charter revisions. He noted all meetings are recorded digitally and as minutes.

Al Clemens, Town resident, thanked the Commission for its public engagement efforts.

Charles Marsh, Town resident, requested Commission members state their reasoning for volunteering to serve on the Commission.

Mr. Turano stated his father was and daughter is involved in politics and he responded to an open request from the Town Council for citizens to volunteer.

Mr. Cioppa stated most members had volunteered to serve the Town and community. He also stated he personally found local government to be the most democratic level of government.

Ms. Ruisi stated she wanted to serve the Town, is interested in local politics and has concerns regarding certain matters.

Mr. Lund confirmed he volunteered to serve the Town.

Mr. Marsh stated the Town Charter should be strong enough to account for responsibility. He stated his belief the Town had not fully exercised its sovereignty and requested the Commission to consider issuing a new Town Charter rather than making several recommendations. Citing a section of the Charter of a municipality in the State of Maine, he noted his concerns regarding a lack of enforcement of environmental regulations by the State and suggested the Town consider contracting with the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Cioppa stated comments can be sent to the Town Clerk by email and the Commission regularly met on Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Clerk's library.

Louis Sposato, Town Councilor, thanked the Commission for its public engagement and service. He noted he previously submitted recommendations for discussion and stated he felt strongly a requirement should be inserted for the Town Manager to hold a master's degree in public administration.

Jack Armstrong, Planning Board member, thanked the Commission for its service. He noted his previous service on the 2002 and 2014 commissions and the discussions held during those times included the insertion of a section on ethics. He cited the ethics section in the Charter of the Town of Narragansett, Rhode Island and stated his belief the inclusion of an ethics code in a town charter allows greater accessibility. He also cited a previous experience in which the Rhode Island Ethics Commission recommended he establish his own investigation regarding a matter of concern he brought up.

Richard Smith, Town resident, noted his previous service on the Board of Finance from 2006 to 2013. He stated his support for a consolidated Finance Department, with a clarification of the Department's organization in the text of the Charter, and noted reasons included concentrated oversight under a single position and previous lack of communication, overlap in certain functions, absence of cross-training and complications when working with outside agencies.

Liv Manelli, Town resident, thanked the Commission for its work.

Mr. Armstrong requested a summary of the Commission's work to date.

Mr. Cioppa summarized the Commission's work to date, which included:

- identification of major areas for review
- recommending vacancies on the Town Council be filled by Town Council appointment until the next regular Town election
- recommending staggered terms for Town Council seats and consecutive term limits
- recommending establishment of a Code of Conduct as part of a recall procedure, also recommended
- recommending consecutive term limits for Planning Board and Zoning Board of Review members
- recommending an attestation be signed by all officials upon taking the Oath of Office
- recommending adoption of a Department of Development Services

Mr. Smith stated he would provide a more detailed summary of his support for a consolidated Finance Department to the Commission.

Mr. Angelo requested Mr. Smith include his opinion on separate heads of a municipal division and school division reporting to a single Finance Director.

Mr. Cioppa stated the Commission was recommending the reduction of Planning Board members from seven to five.

Mr. Clemens questioned if the Commission had considered or made recommendations regarding fire districts.

Mr. Angelo stated the seven fire districts operating in the Town were chartered by the State, which limited the Town's involvement and ability to exercise administration over the districts.

Mr. Marsh noted his concerns regarding public safety and recommended the Commission work to ensure the Charter include functions and procedures to accomplish public safety.

Mr. Cioppa cited the minutes of the March 30, 2016 regular meeting and noted the Commission's previous meeting was informational, with the Town Solicitor and a representative from the Rhode Island Ethics Commission attending.

Karen Baker, Town resident, thanked the Commission for its work and noted her shared concern regarding topics being discussed. She stated her appreciation for public comments and questioned the requirements for running for the Town Council.

Mr. Cioppa stated candidates were required to be a resident of the Town.

(Mr. Turano exited at 10:11 a.m.)

(Mr. Angelo exited at 10:11 a.m.)

Mr. Marsh recommended the Commission's recommendations which are included on the ballot be identified in comparison to any recommendations which might be made by the Town Council.

(Mr. Turano reentered at 10:14 a.m.)

Motion by Ms. Rossomando, Seconded by [Mr. Lund], to take a ten minute break. (Voted unanimously)

(The meeting broke at 10:16 a.m.)

(The meeting reconvened at 10:26 a.m.)

Mr. Marsh stated his concern regarding vested interests among Planning Board and Zoning Board of Review members and confirmed his understanding appointments could not be controlled through the Charter.

Mr. Angelo stated land use is controlled by the Comprehensive Plan and noted the Commission received caution regarding restrictions to those who could serve on the boards. Citing Mr. Armstrong's noted past experience relating to the Ethics Commission, he questioned who would hold responsibility.

Mr. Marsh stated public education was needed.

Ms. Rossomando recommended concerned citizens should apply for appointment or run for election.

Mr. Cioppa stated the Commission had shared Mr. Marsh's concern and reconfirmed Mr. Angelo's note appointers should be aware of who they appoint to a board.

Louis Carazillo, Town resident, questioned if the Charter could address seasonal residents.

Mr. Angelo noted the failure of a past attempt which sought voting privileges in the Town for seasonal residents.

Mr. Cioppa stated all public meetings were open for anyone to attend.

Mr. Angelo stated he had received confirmation from the Rhode Island Attorney General emails were a matter of public record and questioned if and how the Town was keeping record of its emails.

Ms. Ruisi stated her concern emails had disappeared in recent years.

Mr. Cioppa clarified a private meeting occurs if members of a body are holding discussion through email.

Ms. Rossomando cited the League of Women Voters graded the Town as 'A' on availability of records and confirmed for Mr. Angelo she was unsure if retention was included in the grading.

Mr. Angelo stated rules and regulations on record maintenance are established by the State Librarian and questioned the Town's conformance with such rules and regulations.

Mr. Marsh requested the Commission consider the term 'mission critical' or a part thereof to be included as a defining type of information essential for maintaining transparency and accountability.

Mr. Cioppa confirmed he would contact the Town Solicitor regarding additional information on emails as public record.

Mr. Turano questioned Mr. Marsh if he had a central contact for emails he sent regarding his

concerns and recommendations.

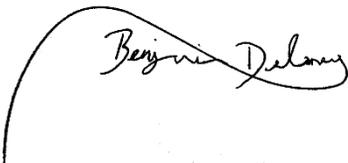
Mr. Marsh stated he sent out blind emails to about 100 individuals and also stated he supported the community feeling of everyone knowing everyone.

3. 11:00 A.M. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Dudley, Seconded by Mr. Lund, to adjourn. (Voted unanimously)

Minutes for the April 9, 2016 public hearing submitted by:

Benjamin Delaney

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin Delaney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the printed name.