



BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Clifford J. Hurgin Municipal Center, 1 School Street
Bethel, Connecticut 06801 Telephone: (203) 794-8501

Matthew S. Knickerbocker, First Selectman
Richard C. Straiton, Selectman
Paul R. Szatkowski, Selectman

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TOWN OF BETHEL
TOWN CLERK

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday, March 5, 2014 - 7:00 p.m.
CJH Municipal Center – Meeting Room “A”

PRESENT: First Selectman Knickerbocker, Selectman Straiton and Selectman Szatkowski. Also in attendance were Town Counsel Martin Lawlor, Charter Revision Commission Counsel Nicholas Vitti and Charter Revision Commission members, David Olson, Chairman, Nicholas Hoffman and Wendy Smith.

First Selectman Knickerbocker called the Special Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Presentation by Charter Revision Commission of its final draft, including proposed changes to the Town of Bethel Charter

Charter Revision Commission Chairman David Olson presented the Board of Selectmen with the Charter Revision Commission's recommendations and provided a brief explanation as to how the commission arrived at their recommendations. He noted that some recommendations were not unanimous.

The Process – David Olson provided the Board of Selectmen with an explanation of the Charter Revision Commission's process thus far.

Convening of the Commission (9/2012)
Initial Public Hearing (10/2012)
Deliberations (9/2012-1/2014)
Public Hearing of Draft Final Report (1/13/2013)
Final Report Presentation to the Board of Selectmen (Filed 1/21/2014)

Item 1: Increase Board of Selectmen from Three to Five Members – David Olson clarified that it was not the recommendation of the Charter Revision Commission to have staggered terms for the members of the Board of Selectmen.

- Consistent with the Selectmen's charge to the Commission

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- Greater representation for Bethel's increased population
- More stringent national, state and local regulatory environment
- Complexity and number of issues before the Selectmen
- Enables subcommittees and meeting of two members without constituting a quorum

Item 2: Increase term of Board of Selectmen from two to four years – *David Olson advised that this was not a unanimous vote of the commission.*

- Recognizes learning period for newly elected Selectmen: scope and responsibilities; town budgetary processes; personnel and management; regulatory environment; building relationships with surrounding communities, state and local officials and U.S. Senators and Representatives
- Strengthens appeal of the positions to well-qualified people
- Provides for continuity between administrations
- Reduces cost of municipal elections usually borne by a few
- Increases risk should voters elect weak candidates (State Statutes do not include a recall provision)

Item 3: Compensation of Municipal Officials – *David Olson explained that the commission discussed various ways to address the compensation and settled on the recommendation from the Board of Finance Chairman.*

- Desire to remove politics from compensation decisions
- Considered requirement to use recognized indices: comparable populations, ERG, DRG
- Agreed on Mr. Kingston's suggestion: Require the Board of Finance to set the compensation of elected officials (Registrars of Voters, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Selectmen and First Selectman) during the budgetary process preceding each municipal or state election.

Item 4: Change Date of Annual Town Meeting – *David Olson explained that this item came as the result of a request by the Tax Collector due to all the factors that come into play from budget referendum approval to when the tax bills are sent out.*

- Request of the Tax Collector to provide more time to prepare tax bills, especially in the event the first budget referendum is unsuccessful

Item 6: Increase threshold for actions requiring a Town Meeting

- Current threshold is \$25,000 for approval of bonds, appropriations and grant acceptance
- Not changed since 2003 (bonds & appropriations) and 2007 (acceptance of grants)
- Updating for today's financial realities

Item 7: Sale, Purchase of Other Disposition of Town Real Estate

- Clarifies Charter paragraph to include "other disposition"

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- Addresses “old town hall” controversy

Item 9: Reference to full-time positions

- Current Charter labels some classified employee positions as “full-time”, but not all. This is a matter of personnel policy fully covered by Chapter 19 of the Town’s Code of Ordinances
- References to “full-time” positions to be deleted as unnecessary in the Charter

Item 10: Change the Threshold for Advertised Bidding

- Given the financial realities of our times, update the threshold for bids requiring advertisement from \$30,000 to \$50,000 (last amended in 2007)

Item 11: Recognize the Fire Companies – *David Olson advised that this came about via a request by the two volunteer fire companies for recognition in the Charter.*

- The current Charter is silent on the existence, responsibilities and operations of the Bethel and Stony Hill fire companies
- The Commission considered options for Charter inclusion: recognition, reporting relationship, a Fire Commission and a Public Safety & Emergency Services Commission
- For this revision Recognition, including the existence, responsibilities, operating requirements (Fire Company charters and state regulations), and reporting relationship to the Town is recommended

Item 12: Town Department Line Item Budget Review and Approval

- Input received from the Public, the Board of Selectmen and Chairman Kingston
- Board of Finance Authority to extend to departmental bottom line budgets, not individual line items
- Departments possess the expertise to decide on line item changes to achieve BOF bottom line objectives
- Recommendation does not change BOF authority with respect to its town budget objectives

Item 13: Special Appropriations and Transfers

- The Commission recommends updating the threshold for Special Appropriations and Transfers from \$25,000 to \$50,000 to reflect today’s financial realities
- This Charter provision was last updated in 2003

Item 14: Budget Neutral Transfers

- Update the Board of Selectmen’s authority threshold from \$25,000 to \$50,000 within individual Town departments
- Improves management flexibility and operational efficiency

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- Recognizes that budgets are established months before implementation and conditions change
- Does not allow an overall Town headcount change without Board of Finance approval
- Note: Section C8-13B(2) requires the Comptroller to report monthly to the Board of Finance the amount of any appropriation, transfer, encumbrance and expenditure

Item 16: Board of Education Special Revenue Funds Account – *David Olson advised that this item has been pulled from the recommendations.*

- Requested by Mr. Craybas on behalf of the BOE
- Recognizes that the BOE receives funds external to State and Town resources (U.S. Department of Defense funding of the BHS NJROTC program, individual student contributions to the Student Activities Fund)
- External funds should not be co-mingled with general revenue
- Note: The item has been determined to be unnecessary as provisions in State Statutes provide the Board of Education with authority over special revenue funds. Additionally, the BOE and the BOF are converging on an appropriate agreement regarding these funds. The Item has been moved to the Section II of the Tracking Document

Item 17: Location of Meetings

- Responds to public input and Commission preferences
- Applies to all elected and appointed Boards and Commissions
- Regular and Special meetings to be held in the Municipal Center, Library or School facilities
- These facilities are readily accessible to the public

Item 18: Public Utilities Commission

- Changes the PUC to a completely appointed Board (now consists of two appointed members and the BOS)
- Helps remove politics from rate-setting decisions
- Provides the opportunity to appoint knowledgeable members
- Includes responsibility for water, sewer and transfer station operations, organization, personnel, budgets and rate-setting (State statutes reserve rate-setting approval authority for the “legislative body” – the Board of Selectmen)

Item 20: Charter Paragraph C8(C-4ii), Comptroller

- The word “Controller” in line 4 should be “Comptroller” with a “p”.

Ballot Recommendation – *David Olson noted that while it is the Board of Selectmen that sets the ballot questions, he asked that the Board of Selectmen consider breaking the questions out as shown below or in a similar manner.*

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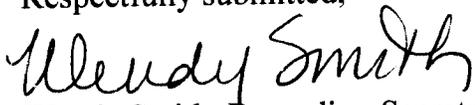
Vote on likely controversial issues separately - Collect like items together

- Item 1 – Five member Board of Selectmen
- Item 2 – Four year terms
- Item 18 – Public Utilities Commission
- Items 6, 10, 13 – Financial thresholds
- Items 12 & 14 – Line item authority and budget-neutral transfers
- Items 4, 7, 9, 11, 17, 20

A general discussion took place regarding the Charter Revision Commission's recommendations. The Board of Selectmen anticipates that this will be an agenda item at their meeting on March 18th. Charter Revision Commission Attorney Nick Vitti explained the timetable for the Board of Selectmen noting that within 15 days, the Board of Selectmen needs to meet and make recommendations (if they have any) to the Charter Revision Commission, who then can accept or reject the Board of Selectmen's recommendations.

As there was no further business on tonight's agenda, Selectman Szatkowski made a motion, which was seconded by Selectman Straiton, to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,


Wendy Smith, Recording Secretary