

Town of Ridgefield
Charter Revision Commission Special Meeting
Monday, August 6, 2018 – 4:30 p.m.
Town Hall Large Conference Room
400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut
UNREVISED/UNAPPROVED MEETING MINUTES

*These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

Members Present in Town Hall Conference Room:

E. Burns, W. Davidson, J. Egan, C. Hancock, J. Seem, J. Shapiro, P. Walsh

Member Present by Phone in Orleans, Massachusetts:

E. Geisinger

Member Present by Phone in Ogunquit, Maine:

L. Steinman

Agenda

1. Approve the Minutes from Charter Revision Commission Regular Meeting on July 30, 2018.
2. Review and vote on CRC Draft Report for submission to the BOS.
3. Any other business.
4. Adjournment.

The meeting was called to order by CRC Chair Jon Seem at 4:31 p.m. Ms. Geisinger participated in the meeting by phone from Orleans, Massachusetts. Mr. Steinman participated in the meeting by phone from Ogunquit, Maine. The meeting was set up by conference phone in the meeting room at Town Hall. Ms. Geisinger and Mr. Steinman could hear all seven members of the CRC convened in Town Hall and could hear each other; Ms. Geisinger and Mr. Steinman could speak to all those seven members convened in Town Hall and could speak to each other; and all of those seven members could hear Ms. Geisinger and Mr. Steinman and speak to them.

1. Approval of Minutes of July 30, 2018 Regular Meeting.

Ms. Burns moved and Mr. Walsh seconded a motion to approve the unrevised/unapproved minutes of the July 30, 2018 Charter Revision Commission Regular Meeting as presented. Motion carried 9-0.

2. Review and Vote on CRC's Final Report for Submission to the BOS.

Mr. Seem noted that he had sent the members of the CRC a draft of the CRC's Final Report. He said that he would project onto the screen a somewhat further revised draft of the Final Report, noting that this would give the CRC members an opportunity to go through the draft of the Final Report page by page and provide their comments.

Mr. Steinman read a statement, as follows:

It appears that this will be the Charter Revision Commission's last meeting. I would like to express my gratitude to the Board of Selectmen for nominating me to serve on the Charter Revision Commission. That service has provided me with invaluable insights into the structure and operation of Town government.

To my fellow Commission members, it has been my great pleasure to serve with you. Notwithstanding diverse political and philosophical views, we valued each other's contributions and treated each other with dignity and respect.

Culminating seven months of research, analysis and spirited debate, at the end of June, the Commission unanimously approved a Draft Report of recommended Charter revisions. The Draft Report documented the rationale for each proposed Charter revision and outlined key arguments both pro and con where viewpoints of Commission members diverged.

Amongst the Commission's recommendation was a proposal to rewrite the Town's Code of Ethics. Based upon a review of best practices outlined in the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities' primer on local ethics laws, and a comparison of ethics provisions adopted in other municipalities, it became apparent that the existing Standards of Conduct in Article XI of the Charter required revision. Much of the existing text is aspirational in nature but does not clearly and effectively outline objective standards of conduct to be observed by Town officials and employees, essential elements of a comprehensive ethics code. With the input and endorsement of the Town's Board of Ethics, the Commission unanimously approved proposed new Standards of Conduct as part of the Draft Report.

When presented with the Draft Report, in accordance with State statute, the Board of Selectmen held a public hearing, met to discuss the Charter revision proposals in the Draft Report and the comments on those proposals received at

the public hearing, and forwarded to the Charter Revision Commission a list of its recommendations for consideration in preparing the Final Report.

Pursuant to State law, the Charter Revision Commission was under no obligation to accept any of the Board of Selectmen's recommendations as part of the Final Report. In my view, the detailed and persuasive record to support the Charter revision recommendations in the Draft Report, developed by the Commission over seven months of research, analysis and debate, was not contradicted in any substantive way by the proceedings that followed the submission of the Draft Report to the Board of Selectmen.

Accordingly, the Commission would have been both statutorily authorized and fully justified in rejecting all the recommended changes to the Draft Report. In that case, it would have then been up to the Board of Selectmen to formally reject those portions of the Final Report that it disagreed with.

By contrast, however, the Commission voted to accept a number of the Board of Selectmen's recommendations, including the elimination of the revised Standards of Conduct unanimously approved as part of the Draft Report. Concern that the adoption of the new Standards of Conduct could have "unintended consequences" was cited as a reason for the recommendation even though a waiver provision had been included in the proposed revised Code of Ethics specifically to address any such "unintended consequences" that might occur.

Because I believe that the objective standards of the revised ethics code incorporated in the Draft Report are in the public interest and are necessary to promote both the reality and the perception of integrity in municipal government, I am unable to support the Final Report presented today. For these reasons, I urge my fellow Commissioners to reconsider the decision to accept this recommendation from the Board of Selectmen and instead vote to reinstate the proposed Standards of Conduct in the Final Report.

After a brief period of further discussion, Mr. Steinman and Ms. Geisinger then temporarily left the meeting, to rejoin the meeting by phone later.

The seven CRC members in Town Hall went through the latest draft of the Final Report, page by page, making several edits and accepting many changes already reflected in that draft of the Final Report. At the end of that page-by-page review, Ms. Geisinger and Mr. Steinman re-joined the meeting by phone.

Mr. Walsh moved and Mr. Egan seconded a motion that the version of the Final Report of the Charter Revision Commission as revised at this meeting be accepted and approved as the Final Report of the Commission, subject to the Chairman of the Commission having the authority to make minor editorial revisions prior his finalization and transmittal of the Final Report. Motion carried 8-1.

Mr. Seem explained that his plan would be to make minor editorial revisions and then transmit the final version of the CRC's Final Report on August 7, 2018. Ms. Geisinger then left the meeting.

3. Any Other Business.

Mr. Shapiro moved and Ms. Burns second a motion to cancel the Regular Meetings of the Charter Revision Commission scheduled for August 13, 2018 and August 27, 2018. Motion carried 8-0.

4. Adjournment.

Mr. Walsh moved and Mr. Egan seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:27 p.m. Motion carried 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Joe Shapiro, Recording Secretary