

Windham Charter Revision Commission

Revised minutes

5/23/2013

Attendees: Douglas Lary, Dennis O'Brien, Barbara McGrath, Erika Haynes, Donna Nicolino, Priscilla Root, Jan-Maya Schold,

- I. Called to order: Erika Haynes called the meeting to order at 7pm
- II. Commissioners Introduce themselves: Erika Haynes: she is the chair of the commission and this is her second charter. Donna Nicolino- she is the vice chair and this is her second charter as well. Barbara McGrath: this is her first charter commission. Jan-Maya Schold: this is her 1<sup>st</sup> charter commission. Doug Lary: this is his first charter commission. Priscilla Root: this is her first charter commission. Dennis O'Brien: this is his fourth charter commission.
- III. Citizens and Delegations related specifically to the charter: Erika Haynes asked that the public relate their comments to the charter and she is going to allow the commissioners to ask questions.

Richard Bloomer (Prospect street, Willimantic)- **Mayor:** we had three fine people run for the position of the Mayor: only one person won, since that time those other people have not done much as far as contributing. Mr. Bloomer would like to see the Mayor be taken out of the Town Council; in addition he would like the duties of the Mayor to be spelled out. **School Budget:** Mr. Bloomer spoke about the cost of copiers in the school budget, he suggested there should be one copier per building; someone needs to be looking at the budget and get rid of all the duplicate cost. (Finance, warehouse, maintenance, etc.). **Police Department:** Mr. Bloomer would like to see one police department. He gave a lot of figures regarding cost and he looked at the cost for police work in Mansfield. He handed out a packet of information for the commissioners to look at.

Jean-deSmet: she stated she has been very busy since running for Mayor, she submitted a list of several items for the commission to consider: **General Elections:** instant runoff voting or similar ranked voting: we have a mayor who represents a small % of people. With the instant voting you would eliminate candidates until you get majority vote. You could challenge the secretary of the state and see what happens. Jean also suggested looking at the term limits for office holders: appointed and elected. Elimination of national party designations for local elections. She would like to see voting done by wards in the two service districts (have 5 councilors elected and 3 at large). **Democracy:** empower the people with the right to initiative and referendum as well as lower the percentage of voters needed to make the referendum binding. Jean would like a broader dissemination and postings of agendas, meeting dates and places, including posting all minutes and agendas on the website. She would like a formal question and answer period for all permanent boards and commissions (citizens' comments). She feels corporation's should not be empowered to

vote and all taxpayers (not citizens) should be empowered to vote. She would like to see clarification for definitions of commission, committee and ad-hoc. Jean would like alternate positions created for the Ethics Commission. **Board of Finance:** Jean would like the commission to reevaluate representation of the finance board to represent the districts and would like to limit the Board of Finance's ability to veto the Town Council recommendations to the \$100,000 or more. **Tax Equality:** Jean would like to create a new service district, extending police and fire service to Route 6 North Windham business zone only. She would also like to take garbage out of the taxes and make it a service fee. Jan-Maya Schold asked what you would call this new entity: Jean responded with North Windham Business district. **Miscellaneous:** Jean would like to increase the independence of the water and sewer commissions: the Town Council has personnel power over the water and sewer; let them run independently. Jean would like to ask the labor attorney for recommendations: get the attorney opinions. Jean also feels the Council and Mayoral payments should include reimbursement for travel and time, not fixed salaries. Jean would also like to see constables established. Barbara McGrath questioned the role of the constables. Jean responded with: supplement police and fire at events, crowd control, directing traffic, etc. Dennis O'Brien stated that right now you need 15% of voters in affirmation for a referendum to pass. This number appears to show up in several different towns' charters but the towns are not locked in by the state Law. Dennis agrees with voting by wards. Jan-Maya Schold would like clarity on what the town can and cannot do. She also would like to see the charter of the 1<sup>st</sup> taxing district; we do not want to create issues. Henry Crane (Windham Street, Willimantic): He would like to have one town police force and two public comment sections at meetings (beginning and end).

Mike Sikoski (Windham): He is the chair of the Ethics commission. He would like to consolidate the town. He also suggested checking the police numbers presented by Mr. Bloomer. Mike would like to see the Willimantic police expanded out into the Windhams. In addition he suggested the draft minutes should be posted on the website.

James Flores: James thanked the board; he encouraged commission to put diversity of the board. He does not want the commission to back off of the issues; but items out to the voters and let them decide. James would like the commission to grab the bull by the horns and consolidate the town. James would like to see the town split into districts which will allow everyone a fair chance at running for a position. He would like to see the board of finance eliminated. He raised concerns about minority representation on this committee and among town employees. Doug Lary asked if he would like to see things put on the ballot as a collection or separate issues: James believes big issue items should be separate. Erika stated the commission does not have control over how the items are presented to the public. She also asked how we make sure the public understands the options and what are being presented. James stated the meeting should be public including being aired on television. Erika stated we need to put pressure on the town officials and the meeting location for tonight was not determined by the committee.

Mary Lou Devivo (Windham): she would like to see one police force for the Town of Windham. She stated we have three elementary schools it would take three state

troopers to respond in a big emergency event and they may be coming from Colchester. She also believes the meetings should be telecasted (knows someone who may do the taping).

Bernard D'Autil (walnut street, Willimantic): He stated the Board of Finance dealt with the majority of the budget; Town Council did not do much with it. He does not feel the hospital should be dictating most of the town and the happenings of the town; the charter should be able to constrict this. He agrees with James that all items should be sent to the voters to see the opinion of the people. He feels the Board of Education should be reined in. He stated we need to use the charter to free us.

A letter from Michael Westerfield was read (he was not able to attend the meeting but requested the letter to be read) : I believe that it has become apparent during the course of the past four years that the current arrangement of "weak mayor" and town manager is not in the best interest of the democratic process of Windham. While both the present mayor and town manager are good, decent individuals, working hard for our town, a problem arises from the fact that our chief elected official, chosen by the voters of Windham, has no executive powers, and the chief executive officer, with the power to make serious far reaching decisions, is not directly responsible to the voters for his actions. I believe that the Charter Revision Commission should seriously consider proposing a revision to the Town Charter, calling for a "strong mayor" with the powers of chief executive officer and a two year term, with the town manager, or an executive assistant working under his/her direction. Under this system I believe that the chief executive officer would be most accessible and responsive to the residents of Windham while necessary continuity would be provided by the town manager or executive assistant who would remain in place if administrations should change.

Erika stated the meetings will be on the 2nd Thursday of the month at the town hall and the fourth Thursdays of the month at the high school media center all at 7pm

IV. Adjournment: Doug Lary made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Barbara McGrath. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 pm

Respectfully submitted Jessica Niles Clerk of the Charter Revision Commission