

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Hadley Rose called the Special Meeting of the Simsbury Charter Revision Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 5, 2016. The meeting was held in the Board of Education Conference Room of the Simsbury Town Offices located at 933 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT. In attendance were the following commission members: Hadley Rose, Mary Glassman, Anita Mielert, Melissa Osborne, Lydia Tedone, Edward Pabich and Robert Crowther. Staff included Tom Cooke, Director of Administrative Services and Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Rose took this opportunity to thank Mr. Tom Cooke and Mr. Robert DeCrescenzo for their time and information provided the Commission. He also thanked everyone on the Commission for their time over the last eight months. Commissioner Mielert thanked Chairman Rose for setting the tone for a non-partisan Commission.

PUBLIC HEARING

Ms. Joan Coe of 26 Whitcomb Drive stated her disapproval over the hours of testimony and meetings that could have been eliminated if the Charter didn't include extraneous changes and a form of government with a remaining First Selectman in a ceremonial role with a salary. She also commented on her dissatisfaction that some Commissioners did not attend the public hearing on April 28, 2016 resulting in no quorum and no vote. Ms. Coe added that the meeting was abruptly finished without addressing the other agenda items. Ms. Coe recommended that the Charter includes the residency requirement for the Town Manager position in order for the Town Manager to serve as an integral part of the community.

Commissioner Rose responded to Ms. Coe stating that the members of the Commission are volunteers and events occurred that prevented some members attending the public hearing on April 28, 2016. Also, Commissioner Rose said that the final report is published so that the public can access and comment during public hearings. The report can be changed by the Commission afterwards.

Mr. Robert Kalechman of 921 Hopmeadow Street said he is addressing the Board today as a citizen of Simsbury and a candidate for State Representative of the 16th District. In his observation of this Commission and previous Commissions, it is in his opinion that the members are here for self-serving purposes. He disapproves of a Town Manager form of government and strongly feels that the Charter should be rejected. Mr. Kalechman reviewed his processes to restore the Constable position in the Charter. He is convinced that removing the position was self-serving by a few individuals in town.

Mr. Chip Houlihan of 2 Summerset Lane thanked the Commission for volunteering their time. He is the President of the Chamber of Commerce in town and wanted to make his feelings known about removing the Economic Development Commission (EDC) from the Charter. He stated while serving as

Chairman for two years on the EDC, the Talcott Mountain Music Fest and flood plains were created. Most recently, EDC was involved in development of the town website. EDC serves as valuable resource for business owners to discuss land use processes, provide suggestions for improvement and create a more business friendly town. Mr. Houlihan said it is important for the town to make a statement of its commitment to economic development and keep the EDC as a permanent Commission in the Charter.

Commissioner Crowther responded to Mr. Houlihan’s comments stating that he was one of the members that voted to eliminate the EDC because he didn’t see the proactive nature of the Commission. Commissioner Crowther discussed the \$1 million gap in taxes as a result of The Hartford leaving town. In his opinion, the EDC had at least two years to take control of the issue and he didn’t see any progress. He added that the EDC should drive development and work with businesses to make sure they grow and stay in town. Therefore, the report from the Commission designated the Town Manager to coordinate and be proactive with increasing business in town.

Mr. Houlihan said that the town responded with a Charrette and adopted possible land uses that offered developers a variety of options. The EDC had a degree of various supporting roles with the Charrette.

Ms. Chris Barnett of 15 Ox Yoke Drive is the Vice Chairman of the EDC. She is disappointed that no one from the Charter Revision Commission asked for input from the EDC members. She thinks there are better ways for the EDC to function but the Charter states to “grow the grand list”. She recommended that the EDC’s function is more specifically defined if it remains in the Charter. Ms. Barnett said the EDC was involved in developing the Talcott Mountain Music Fest, bus tours of the town for developers, the Charrette and town website. The EDC also endorsed funding studies for Weatogue and Tariffville. She added that Simsbury Main Street Partnership is funded by EDC’s budget.

Ms. Barnett also stated the Economic Task Force Committee resulted from the EDC. It brought to the EDC’s attention that that the EDC in conjunction with the First Selectman is the keeper of the brand for the town. The EDC webpage is a vital resource for business owners and developers. It includes zoning, tourism, available parcels and current projects. Ms. Barnett said that she was instrumental in redoing EDC’s webpage on the town website. Ms. Barnett added the EDC is needed in order to continue to send the right message to developers and business owners and to serve as an advocate for them.

Commissioner Osborne asked to what extent can the tasks mentioned by Ms. Barnett be accomplished by one professional as opposed to the EDC -- that sometimes has work and sometimes doesn’t. Ms. Barnett responded that an outside body of people needs to question some of the projects or developments that come before the Commission. A Town Manager, employed by the town, would not be an independent body. Instead, a Commission of people can serve as an independent advisory board.

ADJOURNMENT OF PUBLIC HEARING

Commissioner Rose closed the public hearing. There was no objection from the members.

COMMENCEMENT OF SPECIAL MEETING

Commissioner Pabich said it was unfortunate that he didn’t hear the testimonies about the EDC months ago because he would have voted differently.

Commissioner Glassman said that the Economic Task Force did come before the Commission to testify and people were aware that the EDC was on the Commission’s agenda. She added that the Charter Revision Commission does consider economic development really important and that is why they voted to have the responsibility of economic development under the Town Manager.

Commissioner Tedone asked about EDC’s \$50,000 funding to Main Street Partnership. Commissioner Glassman said that it’s up to the BOS to decide how to allocate the money. Commissioner Tedone confirmed that it is the Charter Revision Commission’s intent to go forward with an ad-hoc committee. She also asked about the ambiguous definition listed in the Charter for the EDC. Commissioner Glassman said the intent of the definition was to provide flexibility for EDC to grow the grand list and keep taxes down. Commissioner Glassman added that the BOS should provide leadership for the EDC to focus their activities.

Commissioner Mielert said that to invest such an enormous responsibility in one Commission is a mistake and requires renewed attention. The EDC has done a lot of important work but it is more effective to move toward as an ad-hoc approach while developing a strategic plan for the town. She added that the responsibility of the EDC should be with the BOS since they are elected and the EDC is appointed.

Commissioner Mielert objected to comments that EDC has been a leader with the branding of Simsbury. She said that the EDC does not do the branding for the town; that is done by the Main Street Partnership and their graphic consultant. Commissioner Mielert added that changes to the WPCA were spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce. Also, the streetscape for downtown Simsbury came from her office when she was First Selectman.

Commissioner Crowther said the responsibility of economic development is too important to be placed with just the EDC. Economic Development needs to be the focus of the policy makers as they look across the multiple commissions and town groups to have a coordinated approach to respond to new growth opportunities and retain existing businesses. He added there is probably a role for a Commission, but the role has to be defined. A group of people are needed to get the message out through brochures and websites, but should report to and the messages coordinated by the policy makers. He added that the plus of having a permanent commission is they can take action when necessary and would not need a large learning curve to support those actions

Commissioner Glassman said there are subcommittees such as Tourism and Main Street Partnership that work on the branding. She commented that the EDC doesn’t have to be in the Charter, it can be created at the pleasure of the BOS. What is most important is to have the flexibility to respond quickly

to the opportunities as they are presented to the town. This could be handled through an ad-hoc committee.

Commissioner Pabich said that there doesn't seem to be a consensus to reverse the decision about removing the EDC from the Charter. He recommended a specific ad-hoc group that is made up of some of the members of the current EDC for a 1-2 year period to work with the BOS to better define a policy for an economic development commission.

Commissioner Glassman asked Mr. Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney, what are the Commission's options if they don't want the EDC in the Charter but want to recognize it as a valuable committee? He commented that if the Charter passes at referendum, it won't take effect until Dec. 2017. That provides ample time for the BOS to give the EDC a scope of work through adopting an ordinance or create a special two-year ad-hoc Economic Development Committee. Mr. DeCrescenzo added that an ordinance offers more flexibility to develop a scope of work, create tasks, decide on the number of members and establish committees. Listing the Economic Development Committee in the Charter is too restrictive.

Commissioner Glassman said the EDC term is currently five years, which is a long time. She commented that it is easier to find people to serve on a committee for two years instead of five. Commissioner Glassman said the more she hears of the options available to raise the importance of economic development in town, the more she agrees with the Commission's recommendation. She said that the ad-hoc committee is a more effective approach.

Commissioner Osborne said that the Commission is very interested in economic development and we want to find better methods to move Simsbury forward and the Commission doesn't think the EDC is the right approach for the town.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Ms. Joan Coe of 26 Whitcomb Drive said she has had conversations with others in town about the EDC. She said that people need a skill set to work on the economic development ad-hoc committee. This will provide a more professional end result. She added that the Commission is on the right track with an ad-hoc approach.

Mr. Dave Balboni of 13 Fox Den said he has been on EDC for 50 years. The strength of the EDC is based on the leadership, people on the Commission and the economics of the times. He recommended the EDC to remain in the Charter and serve under the First Selectman.

Mr. Robert Kalechman of 921 Hopmeadow Street read to the Commission section 701 in the Charter. He said the BOS can decide if they want an EDC. Mr. Kalechman also mentioned that he was watching the EDC on t.v. one evening. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Deming, Chairman of the EDC, said he was attending a political party at the Bushnell and the town paid \$95 for the ticket. Mr. Kalechman objected to the use of tax payers' money for political parties.

Ms. Chris Barnett of 15 Ox Yoke Drive said there is the possibility that an ad-hoc committee will result in members not having the background knowledge necessary to do the job appropriately because the group isn’t continuously meeting.

Mr. Chip Houlihan of 2 Summerset Lane gave an example of a business owner trying to expand their business but wasn’t able to get support from the Planning or Zoning Commissions. However, when the issue was brought to the attention of the EDC, the business owner was given help. Mr. Houlihan said that the business owner was helped because the EDC was a Chartered Commission. If it was an ad-hoc committee, the issue wouldn’t be addressed.

3. Possible changes to and final approval of Final Report of the Charter Revision Commission

Commissioner Rose asked the Commission if anyone had any changes to the draft report. Commissioner Crowther said he would like to review the language drafted on the Economic Development Commission.

Mr. Robert DeCrescenzo, Town Attorney, said that a motion is required if additional narrative is added to the report. Commissioner Glassman asked if the minutes from this evening can accompany the report. Mr. DeCrescenzo said that the Chairman can comment about the topic during the presentation to the BOS and include an addendum to the report. The Commission may take time to think about the topic and have the report drafted to reflect tonight’s comments, which will require another meeting and motion. He added that Commission members can’t discuss the topic outside of the meeting.

Commissioner Osborne said that the language in the draft report states that the Charter Revision Commission is concerned with economic development and the town needs a more effective method than the EDC.

Commissioner Glassman said that the minutes for this evening should reflect the ideas raised and the options mentioned, such as ordinance or ad-hoc committee.

Commissioner Mielert moved to approve the draft as a final report subject to final editorial corrections by Town Counsel and Town Staff. Commissioner Osborne seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Review of Minutes: Special Meeting of March 30, 2016.

Commissioner Tedone’s name is to be included in the “Call To Order” paragraph.

Minutes were approved with changes.

2. Possible changes to and final approval of draft revised Charter.

No changes were made.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Rose moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mielert and was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Irene Muench