

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT CHARTER COMMISSION
MEETING

CHARTER COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING
August 16, 2010
7:00 p.m.
WESTBROOK HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY

Call to Order

The Public Hearing was called to order by John Ferrara, Chairman at 7:07 p.m. In attendance included: Lee Bridgewater, Mark Lynskey, John Ferrara, Ann Barton, Pat Labbadia, Mary Labbadia, and Bob Schreck (arrived at 7:21 p.m.)

Audience members present included: Mildred D. Clements, Joan Angelini, Kim Bratz, Jennifer and Julie Labbadia.

The Westbrook Charter Commission held its Public Hearing on Monday, August 16, 2010 in the Library of the Westbrook Jr./Sr. High School to conduct the following business:

- 1) To update residents on the formation of a Charter Commission.
- 2) To solicit the public's comments regarding a charter and,
- 3) To transact any other such business as may properly come before the public hearing.

John Ferrara briefly reported on the background of the Charter process through the years in Westbrook starting in 1992. In 1992, there was no desire to move forward with the Charter process. The 2005-2006 Ad Hoc Charter Study Committee recommended by a vote of 5-3 for the BOS to move forward in appointing a Charter Commission. That recommendation was rejected by the then current BOS. More recently in 2009, an Ad Hoc Committee studied the advantages and disadvantages to establishing a Charter. Their report was fact based but they made no recommendation. This past spring the BOS appointed the current nine member commission.

John Ferrara continued that, in general, the BOS believes the purpose of a Charter is to provide a readily accessible and clear blueprint for the operation of town government, and to that end should contain uniform rules concerning appointments and terms of office; specify clear lines of authority and reporting; and provide specific descriptions as to the responsibilities of all boards, commissions, and elected officials governed by the Charter. While the current statute-based form of government, including the Code of Ordinances, already provides such information, the Board feels that issues such as appointment of positions and terms of office should be, as much as possible, made more uniform.

The Charter Commission will focus on the following areas accountability, government structure, budgeting, and government responsiveness.

Throughout the 16 month long process, there will be opportunities for public input. The Charter Commission's intent is to have the process open and transparent. They anticipate holding more than the required 2 public hearings. Information pertaining to the Charter Commission will be located on the town's website and the Commission will inform the public via newsletters and mailings.

The floor was opened for public comment.

Kim Bratz expressed concern that any change in the leadership of Westbrook, via elections, could prove to be a hindrance to the Charter process. John Ferrara responded that the intent is to provide a document with wide appeal. Once a Charter is passed, a time frame for adoption would be determined.

Terms of office, election of officials, size and composition of boards and commissions and the use of a Town Manager vs. a First Selectman will be topics of discussion for the Charter Commission.

Mildred Clements questioned the role of town committees. Pat Labbadia responded that the BOS will not necessarily appoint all board and commission members. This topic will also be addressed in the Charter. He continued that drastic changes on how commissions/committees act are not anticipated.

John Ferrara commented that the intent of the Charter is not to change positions that are currently elected to appointed or the methodology used to fill vacancies. The intent is to make the process clear and transparent.

John Ferrara reported that the current Charter Commission is studying charters from surrounding towns (Portland, Madison, Old Saybrook, Clinton, Durham, Thomaston, Marlborough, Haddam and Middlebury) with similar demographics. These charters will be discussed at up-coming meetings.

Charter Commission members introduced themselves and gave a brief background on why they wanted to serve on the Charter Commission.

John Ferrara reported on the importance of public input. Members from Boards and Commissions throughout the town will be invited to participate at the Charter meetings.

The next Charter Commission meeting is scheduled for August 23, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. at the Mulvey Municipal Center. Charter Commission meetings are scheduled for the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month.

Adjournment

Bob Schreck made a motion to close the Public Hearing at 8:03 p.m . Pat Labbadia seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski

Lee Bridgewater