



City of Ansonia

253 MAIN STREET
ANSONIA, CONNECTICUT 06401

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Madeline H. Bottone
TOWN AND CITY CLERK
ANSONIA, CONNECTICUT

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

May 23, 2013

Regular Meeting

Present: John Marini, Chairman
Patrick Henri
Kay Jeanette
David Knapp
Christopher Lisi
William Luneski
Elizabeth Lynch
Janet Vitarius Waugh
Lorie Vaccaro

Others Present: Mayor James Della Volpe
Kevin Blake, Corp. Counsel
Richard Sturges, BOAT Chairman
Tara Kolakowski, Gov. Liaison Officer
Richard Bshara, Asst. Comptroller

The regular meeting of the Ansonia Charter Revision Commission was called to order at 7:15 p.m. by Chairman Marini.

All present rose and Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

The secretary called the roll.

There was a quorum present.

CharterRev052313

Public Session

Chairman Marini invited anyone from the public who wished to speak on anything that is not on the agenda.

Chairman Marini asked three (3) times if there was anyone who wished to address the Commission.

There was no one.

Chairman Marini closed the public session.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Knapp made a motion to approve as written and place on file the minutes of the Regular Meeting 4/25/13. Mrs. Lynch seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Approval of Bills

There were no bills.

Correspondence

1. Letter from Registrar of Voters dated 5/3/13

Mr. Henri made a motion to accept all correspondence and place on file. Mrs. Jeanette seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Chairman Marini said there are six items left on the agenda that the Commission hasn't addressed. He said the Town Clerk position is one and Madeline Bottone is present. He invited her to speak.

Town Clerk – Salary Position

Madeline Bottone, Town & City Clerk was present.

Ms. Bottone said she is here this evening because she received a letter from the Commission requesting that she attend. She said that Charter Revision is meant for the Charter and items that are to be changed in the Charter. She said that there is nothing in the Charter regarding the fees for the Town Clerk.

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Chairman Marini said it is not specific in the Charter and this Board decided that it should be changed but again if it works why change it.

Ms. Bottone said the last three Town Clerks it has been this way, a precedent is set and it is not in the Charter. The system works OK. The fees are paid to the City, the State and the Recording fees are paid part to the State (\$36) and part to the City(\$4). She continued explaining the fees received in her office and whom they are paid to. She said she pays a salary to herself and her Assistant.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh said with regard to financial – who do you report to as your job.

Ms. Bottone said the Mayor.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh said what double checks do you have when you collect money.

Ms. Bottone said it is done on the front computer.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh said who checks that.

Ms. Bottone said the Auditor, yearly.

Mr. Henri asked about the Town Clerk's salary.

Ms. Bottone said it is the same basic salary.

There was discussion on the salary paid to the Town Clerk and the percentage of the yearly salary that is paid by the fees collected. The salary for the Town Clerk is set by Board of Aldermen Resolution. It is set on a 10 year scale. Ms. Bottone has passed the 10 year date and has not received an increase in a number years.

Mr. Knapp noted that Ms. Bottone keeps a certain percentage of the fees for her salary and her Assistants salary however she has donated money back to the City. This money was used to purchase large items for the City.

Ms. Bottone said that is correct. She saved her fees and accumulated over 4 or 5 years enough to purchase an Index for Land Records system for the City.

Mr. Bshara said that the system cost \$100,000 to purchase the top system. This was donated by Ms. Bottone.

Chairman Marini asked Ms. Bottone the total amount of money collected last year in the Town Clerk's office.

Ms. Bottone said she did not know off hand, she would have to look at her reports. The reports are broken down by category.

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Mr. Henri asked if Ms. Bottone writes her own paycheck. She is elected and she answers to the people.

Chairman Marini said is there a set percentage of fees or does it vary.

Ms. Bottone said there is no percentage – it depends on the volume of transactions.

Chairman Marini asked about marriage licenses - \$30 (State – \$19 and City - \$11).

Ms. Bottone said the State sets the fee.

The discussion continued on the fees and who sets the fees and who gets the fees at what percentage.

Ms. Bottone stated that there are reports that are filed with the State of Connecticut and the City of Ansonia regarding the fees collected. This is done on a monthly basis and the records are audited every year.

Mr. Henri brought up the point that Ms. Bottone does a great job however some day there may be someone new in the office. This was brought up to the Commission during the public session at the first public hearing. Also the implication that there would be a cost saving to change the salary to a set salary with no fees but this may not be true.

Chairman Marini said true or not - are we saving money with a set salary.

The discussion continued on whether there would be a cost saving to change the salary to a set salary or leave it as it is. The suggestion to bump up the salary was discussed. The salary for the Town Clerk has been paid this way for over 30 years and it is not in the Charter. The Town Clerk is an elected official and it is not clear who would be responsible to change the way she is receiving her salary.

Chairman Marini asked the base salary for the Town Clerk.

Ms. Bottone said \$27,000.

Chairman Marini said in other towns that don't do this what do they do for wages. This is a fair way of doing it so long as the baseline is not in excess. She is paid by the amount of work that she does through her office. The Board will look at it but she is getting paid by the amount of work she does.

Mayor Della Volpe suggested they contact CCM regarding the salary paid in other towns.

Chairman Marini said the Commission needs more information.

Mr. Henri said he hasn't heard how the City will make out financially if it is changed. He said she doesn't report to anyone. He asked if the position would be better if it was an appointed position vs. an elected position.

Mr. Knapp said that would have to be looked at.

Chairman Marini said a lot of towns are elected.

Mrs. Lynch said Derby is appointed however their Vital Statics are up because they have the Hospital in Derby.

Chairman Marini asked if there was a rough estimate on the fees.

Ms. Bottone said there are reports and she would have to review them.

Mr. Henri said a new Town Clerk comes in with a few years experience what would be a reasonable salary to pay.

Chairman Marini said the Commission would have to find out the following information:

1. Amount of salary paid
2. Amount of fees collected

Mr. Vaccaro said at the first meeting he thought that Ms. Bottone received the short end of the stick – a low salary and dependent on fees.

There was discussion on the amount paid for the index system. Ms. Bottone pointed out that she accumulated the fees over years to pay for that system. Chairman Marini asked what account the fees were saved in. Ms. Bottone said she needs money to pay the State of Connecticut and the City their portion of the fees collected.

There was discussion on what the fee money is used for. Ms. Bottone explained there are conference fees, State fees and City fees plus numerous other items that are paid for out of this account. A portion of the other employee in the office's salary is paid by these fees.

Chairman Marini said the salary is set by Board of Alderman Resolution.

Ms. Bottone said that it is a 10 year Resolution and the salary hasn't changed in a number of years but the fees were sufficient so she did not request an increase in the set salary.

Mr. Lisi said Ms. Bottone is a very gracious person and if we get a less gracious person in there whom would not be as gracious as Ms. Bottone it would not be a good way.

Chairman Marini said it is the person's right to the fees.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh said increase the salary and turn in the fees to the City.

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Mrs. Lynch said there is another employee in the office that receives a portion of the fees.

Chairman Marini asked who determines the salary. Where is the salary starting point?

Mayor Della Volpe said \$27,000 plus the fees.

Mrs. Lynch said there is a salary Resolution for the Mayor, Treasurer and the Town Clerk.

Chairman Marini thanked Ms. Bottone for attending the meeting this evening.

Mr. Knapp made a motion to get the following information:

1. Actual total fees collected for five years – separated by years.
2. CCM for average take home salary for Town Clerk's in Connecticut.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Referendum if there are changes greater than 1 ½ % to the Budget

Chairman Marini said that the next item on the agenda that was not addressed is Item #8 – Referendum if there are changes greater than 1 ½ % of the budget.

Chairman Marini said he is interested in elected officials having the final decision on the budget. The process is BOAT and then it goes to the Aldermen and then the Aldermen review and adjust the budget and it goes back to BOAT for the final approval. He suggested the Mayor work with BOAT and the Aldermen and the Aldermen approve the budget. This way the elected officials have the final approval.

Chairman Marini said if the change in the Budget is more than 1.5 mil then it would go to referendum.

Mr. Bshara said he has been involved with the budget process for many years. There is four years consecutive that the budget went to the Board of Aldermen and they reduced it and for four years there was no increase. The next two years there was a half mil increase and the next two years a half mil increase and we are now at this year.

Mr. Bshara said normally the Board of Aldermen Finance Committee meets with the Dept. Heads, they do cuts and adds and bring it to the full Board of Aldermen. They send it to BOAT. BOAT meets with the Dept. Heads and they do cuts and adds and set the final budget. This year is a hard year. He said he and Ed Adamowski met with the Dept. Heads one time and then they met again under the financial meetings and discussed the department cuts and adds. The Finance Committee met with BOAT and they are involved with all aspects of the Budget. Monday's

public hearing was the final meeting to make changes from the Public Hearing and set the final budget. This year is the first time we had a big raise in the Mil rate.

Chairman Marini asked about revaluation of the real estate and the effect.

Mr. Sturges said we lost 2+ million in net grand list. The old mil rate was 29.73 with reval it went to 39.34. There was a controversy over the Board of Ed and we gave them another \$460,000. We took \$300,000 from the reserve fund and changed \$160,000 for the Board of Ed. The tentative was 39.15 Mil and the change for the Board of Ed was a 1.39 change.

There was discussion on the budget process and that it is a difficult task for the Aldermen and the BOAT members. They have to look at the line items and try to have a balance. Chairman Marini said as Aldermen as much as they could they have to make sure they are not just keeping the Mil Rate down but they are keeping the mix right for the people. It is easy to be distracted by the bottom line – the Departments have services to provide and the Board of Ed also provides a service. The mix has to be right.

Chairman Marini discussed transparency in the process and the way it works. The Board of Aldermen run the City. Month to month they have accountability to the people and it makes sense to have the Board of Aldermen responsible for the budget. BOAT is the watch dog and gate keepers. The Board of Aldermen make sure the allocations are right.

Mr. Sturges said BOAT handles the month to month transfers, the grant process and everything else, if you take away the responsibility of the budget people might not want to serve. They know the line items and the way the spending is for each department. They watch every month.

Chairman Marini said BOAT does a good job but the Aldermen don't have the final say.

Mr. Sturges said the Finance Committee of the Board of Aldermen and BOAT do a lot of talking. We have two boards working together. Eliminate the Finance Committee of the Board of Aldermen and change the composition of BOAT with Aldermen and BOAT members serving and they all have a say.

Commissioners discussed the way other communities handle their budget process. There are some that have a Board of Finance and the Mayor that come up with the budget; they talk to the Department Heads, then the Board of Aldermen review. This will allow BOAT to start early and it will go up to April. The Board of Aldermen have the ability to follow along with the process and there will be enough time for the budget to go back to BOAT for adjustments.

There was discussion on the effect of the revaluation of property. Mr. Sturges said that the only thing that was affected by the reval was real estate. Mr. Bshara said reval brought the real estate to market value. Cars are always at current value. The 2013 real estate is locked in and will not change for five years.

Mr. Henri said the budget might be OK but there is an increase anyway – proportion school vs. rest of the City. A lot of people are upset. Where do they go – their representatives don't have the final say on the budget. Whom can they say to "I don't like what you did?" BOAT is insulated.

Chairman Marini said we want the opportunity to say something about the budget. In New York there was a huge "to do" about the unelected Board. They got rid of it. People should know what we mean to do. It is not fair to play games. As the Tax are people who care. There are people who leave and stay. There are kids in school, the schools are overburdened. The seniors, is it fair for them. They want to stay but they can't afford a one Mil increase. Seniors are moving and families with children are moving in that will add to the school budget. We will look like Waterbury. He asked if the commission wants to take this to draft and start working on specific things. He said he has no problem working with BOAT. He asked if the members thought this is viable to explore a change. The Board of Aldermen is the elected officials. He asked the commissioners if the members are in favor of the Board of Aldermen having a say.

Mr. Vaccaro said the tax bills come out and the aldermen will be receiving calls.

Chairman Marini said yes, he knows, he wishes he could say he voted.

Mr. Vaccaro said he is all for elected officials having the final say.

Mr. Sturges said over the last few years all the fat was cut out of the budget. You have to tell the residents about the State decrease in the programs. The Pilot program has zero, LOCIP has very strict requirements to apply and it is like a grant. The school bus funds you have to apply for now and you have to meet certain criteria and unless you regionalize you probably won't get much funding.

Mr. Bshara said he has been part of the budget for 30 years now – serving on BOAT and then as Asst. Comptroller. The Board of Aldermen have the final say. You can say I'm going to cut the budget. That is what the voters want. You have to look at the big picture. These guys work all year long with the Department Heads coming to meetings every month. They find out the inner working of the City. The decision making at the end of the year, they know, they are a part of it for two months. They voted it in and they made the decision. The Board of Aldermen have the knowledge to make the decision. They are bi-partisan on BOAT. They do what they think is the best for the City. It is not a bad thing – it is an on-going process. He said he doesn't know if the aldermen want another group of meetings to attend. The aldermen run the City and BOAT will run the finances.

Chairman Marini said he agrees. BOAT is very important. The Aldermen can get information from BOAT and be accountable to the people. It has to be a mix. BOAT needs to be a part of it and the Board of Aldermen should be able to weigh in and make the decision. He said he hasn't found another City that has our system where they are appointed.

Mayor Della Volpe said the Mayor can prepare a Budget and have veto power.

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Chairman Marini said the Mayor is part of BOAT.

Mayor Della Volpe said he has a say but no vote.

Chairman Marini said give the Mayor authority to work with BOAT on the budget and then it goes to the Board of Aldermen. He said the Commission has to come up with something concrete. He asked if anyone thinks BOAT should not have a say.

Mr. Bshara said starting in Ansonia today how would you devise the system? One option is to hire a Business Manager to run the town. It is a business orientated process and someone should be involved day to day. A mayor or business manager and then they bring it to BOAT.

Chairman Marini said we discussed a City Manager but you keep the Mayor. We don't want to pay someone and have a manager too. To find someone to work and be a qualified individual we have to be sure it is not too costly. Do we want to lose the Mayor?

Mr. Bshara said he did not say City Manager – he said Business Manager.

Chairman Marini said if a business manager what positions would roll over into that new position to take over.

Mr. Bshara said there are parts of jobs. Business Manager to run the business, Comptroller to run the financial, the tax office and the assessor office. A lot of pieces going on – insurance, Human Resources, etc. Business could be involved in a lot of areas to be looked at.

Chairman Marini said Board of Ed would be involved in this also.

Mr. Bshara said primary function would be budget and contracts.

Chairman Marini asked to move this to the Draft List.

Tara Kolakowski said you need a salary survey. The structures for Business Manager, Mayor, Comptroller – the question is where do you want to go with the City. Where are the designs – First Selectman – Mayor – Business Manager – City Manager – either or. She said she has the information on this and will e-mail it to the members. The salary is \$80,000, \$100,000, \$120,000. We are not structured for that. You have a Business Manager hired at \$100,000/\$110,000.

Chairman Marini said you will need that kind of salary.

Ms. Kolakowski said you have a union issue. You are eliminating jobs. You said take that job and eliminate that salary and use it for the City Manager/Business Manager.

Chairman Marini said the Economic Development Director job is not filled, take that salary.

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Ms. Kolakowski said so you are going to say OK, now you are an Econ. Dev. Director also.

Mr. Knapp said the fellow from Manchester did a few different positions.

Ms. Kolakowski said his salary was \$140,000 + with 7000 people in his town. She said she will give the members the information from CCM.

Chairman Marini said the two questions to be considered for the Draft List are:

1. Referendum for the Budget if there is a tax increase above a certain amount.
2. Does it make sense to have a referendum?

Mr. Henri said if the budget goes above 1.5 Mills it goes to referendum.

Mr. Lisi said there should be a cap on the number of referendums held.

Discussion the number of referendums that should be held with regard to passing the Budget. Mr. Blake advised them of the cost (\$10,000 est.) for each referendum that is held if the budget is not passed. Ms. Kolakowski said the cost to Woodbridge is over \$50,000 and Ansonia can't afford that as a community. She said that there should be a cap on the number of times, it should be two referendums and the Mayor has the final vote.

Mr. Henri said there is a question on the ballot that helps you know which way to go with it. The questions are 1. Too high and 2. Too low. He said the City is holding a referendum in June why not put it on the ballot in November to save money.

Mr. Bshara said there are a number of the things that have to be done before the winter and it would cost an extra 1 or 1.5 Mil. Either you put it in the budget or plan a referendum.

Mr. Henri made a motion to move to the Draft List - if there is a Budget increase above 1.5 Mills it will go to Referendum with a cap on the number of votes. Mr. Vaccaro seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Mr. Henri made a motion to change the way the Budget is approved that the Board of Aldermen have the final say in the Budget. Mr. Luneski seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Reduce the number of Wards and Polling Places and Each Ward will have three (3) Aldermen. Two (2) from each party will run for office and the top three (3) get the seats

Ms. Vitarius Waugh said that there is not that much savings in a change of polling places.

Chairman Marini said Ward 6 and Ward 7 have a large amount of people voting.

Mrs. Lynch said that there was a Ward Boundary Commission and the Wards have been established.

Ms. Vitarius Waugh made a motion to leave the wards as is.

There was no second.

Mr. Henri read the list and letter from the Registrar on the reasons why they want to change the wards. He said the option is to combine Ward 3, 4 and 5. Tom and Nancy recommended this.

Mr. Lisi said they did not mention voter turnout. Neither mentioned change of voter turnout – will it go down. None of those communities are like Ansonia demographically.

There was discussion on the demographics of Ansonia and the people who live here. There is a concern for the people who go to their local polling place to vote. Some of these people walk to vote and others get rides. Ansonia is not that big of a town. A concern was that the people who live downtown would have to travel to the hilltop to vote.

Mr. Blake said that if St. Anthony Church closes the City can get permission from the Secretary of State to combine and have a central polling place. That has been done in the past. Reduce the number of Polling Stations – not wards. He cited the Center School in Woodbridge as an example.

Mr. Sturges said that if there are two wards in one common place they have to be segregated when voting. They would operate separately with their own moderators.

Chairman Marini said we would not be saving anything.

Mr. Blake said it may not be the best option.

Ms. Kolakowski said that Derby votes in two places. We can have the Hilltop, Downtown and the West Side – three wards.

Chairman Marini asked if the commission wants to put this on the Draft list.

Mr. Knapp said he doesn't think we should do anything. We have seven wards and seven polling places.

Chairman Marini said we can have three wards and seven aldermen in each ward.

Mr. Henri said Mr. Maffeo and Ms. Valentine made recommendations and they suggest going from seven wards to five wards because of the size of the City. It will help them out and their job will go easier if we go to five wards.

Chairman Marini said if you change the wards you change the Board of Aldermen.

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There was discussion on the number of aldermen each ward would have if there were changes. Would there be four aldermen with three wards. Five aldermen for each ward if there are three wards or twelve aldermen.

Chairman Marini said that the people will not get the personal attention with more aldermen per ward. With two aldermen per ward they get more personal attention.

Mr. Knapp said there is an insignificant financial advantage to changing. He said to leave the wards as they are and encourage more people to get out and vote.

Mr. Luneski said he agrees and there is less travel for the people who want to go and vote.

There was discussion on the reasons Mr. Maffeo and Ms. Valentine requested the changes in the wards and polling places. Both have been Registrars for only a year and they brought up that there would be a financial saving to consolidate the wards and polling places. There doesn't seem to be any savings.

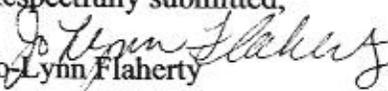
Mr. Knapp made a motion to remove this from the agenda. Mrs. Lynch seconded. All in favor with one No vote (P.Henri). 8 yes and 1 no. The motion carried.

Chairman Marini said he would like to have the committees meet to discuss the draft list items.

Adjourn

Mr. Knapp made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m. Ms. Vitarius Waugh seconded. All in favor, so carried.

Respectfully submitted,


Jo-Lynn Flaherty
Secretary

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2013 at 7:15 p.m.