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**CITY OF ANSONIA
BOARD OF ALDERMEN**

**Minutes of the Public Hearing on Charter Revision
August 26, 2014**

14 SEP 12 AM 9:50

Elysebeth Lynch
TOWN AND CITY CLERK
ANSONIA, CONNECTICUT

Call to Order

The Public Hearing of the Ansonia Board of Aldermen was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Aldermanic President Philip Tripp. All those present rose and pledged allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Attendance:

Edward Adamowski, D1-present (6:40)
Charles Stowe, R1 – present
Philip Tripp, R2 – present
Lorie Vaccaro, R2 – present
Denice Hunt, D3 – present
Joseph Jeanette, D3– present
Anthony DeLucia, D4 – absent

Jerome Fainer, D4–present (6:40)
Anthony Cassetti, R5 – present
Joan Radin, R5 – present
Matthew Edo, R6– absent
Patrick Henri, R6 – present
David Blackwell, Jr., R7 – present
Daniel Evans, R7 - absent

Legal Notice

Notice of Public Hearing – Board of Aldermen

The Board of Aldermen of the City of Ansonia Connecticut will hold a public hearing on the recommendations for changes to the Ansonia City Charter on Tuesday, August 26, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chambers of Ansonia City hall, 263 Main Street, Ansonia, CT.

At said hearing all parties will be given an opportunity to be heard. The recommended drafts of recommended changes that are being proposed for November Election Ballot are on file in the Office of the Town and City Clerk, 253 Main Street, Ansonia, CT 06401.

Dated at Ansonia this 22nd day of August, 2014.

David S. Cassetti, Mayor, City of Ansonia

Public Hearing

Phyllis Rivera, 201 Prospect Street
And Anita Seufert, 209 Prospect Street

We are in favor of the proposal of the Charter Revision that would reduce the number of BOAT members and would give our elected Board of Aldermen the final approval of our City annual budget. I feel there should be accountability to the taxpayers by our elected officials. It seems to me that if BOAT can override Aldermen on a budget and taxes, then we have taxation without representation.

Mrs. Seufert stated, I agree with Phyllis.

Randolph Carroll, 40 Fourth Street

I am against the change to the, uh, I'm kind of conflicted. I'm for the change that the Board of Aldermen have the final say on the taxation, on the budget. I've lived here 30 years. I have gone to almost every meeting of both boards in these 30 years. I think that the Board of Aldermen should have the final say but I'm confused because going to the Board of Taxation meetings, there have been very few Aldermen that have gone to those meetings. The Board of Aldermen are very interested in the budget, they really should have been to those meetings to know what's going on. Thank you.

Michael Egan, 103 Benz Street

I'd like to thank the Charter Revision Commission for their diligence in taking on this task. I request that they also stay on for further updating and revision of our Charter. The reduction to 3 wards with 3 Aldermen each seems to be a good idea. The only suggestion I would have is to possibly consider only 2 Aldermen per Ward and have a seventh member at large. I think an at large member would be a plus. I think that the reduction of the Wards is going to save the City money and I think that's something that we have to agree with wholeheartedly.

With BOAT being elected – having elected members taking care of our budget and having the final word on our budget does recognize the intelligence of the voter. Having a non-voter elected board deciding our tax rate kind of puts down the voter.

The only other comments I'd have are on future recommendations for the Charter Revision Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Robert Zuraw, 25 High Acres Road

I'm a little concerned about reducing the number of Wards. My understanding is everybody says "we're doing it because it's going to save us \$5,000 by not having as many workers on the election." It seems to me there are many more ways that we can save \$5,000 - eliminating a few officials and appointments would certainly more than give us \$5,000.

Secondly, if we're concerned about the Board of Apportionment and Taxation not being elected, why don't we have an elected Board of Apportionment? Therefore they are accountable to the voters. Thank you.

Tom Maffeo, 7 Ford Road

I currently serve as the Democratic Registrar of Voters and I would like to share directly with the Board of Aldermen the reasons why the Registrars of Voters have suggested that we consider consolidating to three Wards. My Republican counterpart Nancy Valentine has a prior commitment and is unable to attend tonight, but we share these same views.

If you consider a department manager for a corporation or even a municipality who saw an opportunity for his or her department to save some money and gain efficiencies in how they operated, he would be remiss if he didn't speak up about it. That is why Nancy and I approached the Charter Revision Commission and that's why we're here tonight. We would like to explain in a little bit more detail exactly where the savings would be and why it might benefit Ansonia to make this change. Mr. Zuraw's comment about \$5,000 is a sore point with us to some degree because that seems to be the issue that got in front of the press. It is an issue we would like to discuss and it's a real savings but it's not the only one. I think if we could just expand upon that, I think everybody would be just a bit more comfortable.

There are three ways by which Ansonia can save and enjoy the benefits of Ward reduction. The first is cost savings. We know that by reducing the number of Wards and the number of election workers and the equipment that we need we should enjoy a savings that could approach \$5,000 per election. So that number is accurately out there. Each year we have an election, so it's a \$5,000 savings. This year, for example, we have two - we had the Republican primary earlier this month and we have our regular election in November. So we could enjoy savings of approaching \$10,000.

In the scheme of things, in the City's larger budget, that's not a lot of money; I would grant you that. Yet I'm sure Jeff Coppola would love to see the Recreation Department have that extra \$5,000 or \$10,000. Little League or Soccer would love to have it. The Cultural Commission would love to be able to spend that money if we can. It is a way by which we allocate our resources.

Beyond the operating expense of running an election is the long-term cost we have to bear with equipment. We have scanners that have now been online for a number of elections. Technology is going to change. There may come a time that the scanners become obsolete. We go to Registrars' conventions twice a year and we see the vendors there, we hear the scuttlebutt, we talk to the Secretary of State's Office. We know that down the road the technology will be there where the scanners will become obsolete. If we have to replace a scanner right now, let's say for the November election, we're looking at a \$5,000 bill for a new scanner. Ansonia, by law, must have one scanner per Ward, and a backup scanner per Ward. So we own 14 scanners for the 7 Wards plus two for absentee voting. If we need to replace those scanners we're looking at a bill upwards of \$80,000. It's reasonable to expect that if there's going to be new technology out there, that new technology might be more expensive than what we have now.

[Aldermen Fainer and Adamowski arrives at this point, 6:40 p.m.]

There is one other aspect to cost savings that I'd like to share with you because I think it will hit home. With 7 Wards we have a little bit of a difficulty trying to latch onto the new technology that's out there, because we have to multiply those costs times seven rather than three, for example. There is technology in place right now that some of the municipalities in Connecticut are using. When you go to vote this November, you're going to walk into the poll and your checker is going to ask for your name and address. On a little piece of paper in front of them they're going to cross off your name. That's the old way of checking people in. It's prone to errors; sometimes the checkers get confused – Sr.'s, Jr.'s, things like this. The accuracy of the vote is absolutely critical here. We now have technology that will allow us to use laptop computers. That helps or prompts the checker to ascertain whether it's a Jr. or a Sr. It reduces errors. I've seen this work in Vernon. This winter they held a referendum and I spent a couple of hours watching the process work. It's a gorgeous piece of equipment and software that goes along with it. It would be nice if Ansonia could be able to take advantage of it. At the end of the evening, the computer automatically tallies the number of voters. This is an essential element of our reporting that we have to have at the end of the night. When the vote is finally compiled and Registrars go back to our office during the week after the election, we have to take the name of each voter that came in and voted and we have to put it into the Connecticut Voter Registration Database. Now imagine the Presidential election where we had a 70 percent turnout. We have to put in 6,500 names. Each one by one; it's a very tedious and long-time task. Now, with the new technology, all we need to do is simply download it from the laptop there.

One more aspect of this that I think that you folks might like. You guys remember unofficial checkers at the polls? You know what this is, the political parties put unofficial checkers to sit there and determine who voted. They listen to the names that are called out as they report into the official checkers. With this particular system, we could provide the candidates with a passcode to this software program. You will know in real time exactly who has voted and who has not voted. If you

have a "get out the vote" campaign, and you really want to see if you can get your people out to vote, this is the perfect way to do it. You have real time access to this information. No more unofficial checkers. First of all, the parties can't afford them, and it's tough to find them anyway. Imagine what this type of technology would have done perhaps in the last municipal election when we had several Aldermanic races that were very, very close. It might have been a good thing if those candidates had the opportunity to get their vote out. So technology is out there, it's ever present, it's changing and it would be easier for Ansonia to take advantage of that if we had three Wards rather than seven. Simply less money involved.

Part two is election workers. I think you all know that they are not volunteers, they are paid, but it's very tough to recruit election workers. You're looking at a 17+ hour day. They have to be at the polls at 5:15 a.m. and they generally don't get home until about 10 – 10:30 p.m. It's tough to find people to do this, and the people who are going to do this are what? They're retired people. Retired people tend to be older people. I know that I get tired at 6 o'clock at night and at 6, 7, 8 o'clock when we have to tally the vote, we've got a very, very tired group available to do that work. Going to three Wards gives us the option of either selecting the very best from among our current workers or we could have a split shift. Many towns do that and then you have fresh legs, minds, and eyes come 8 o'clock when you have to tally the result. It's the most important part of the day.

The last item is to take a look at other towns. Ansonia is unique, and that's oftentimes a good thing. But in this case, the 12 Connecticut municipalities that have similar populations to Ansonia - all or each has fewer than 7 Wards. Somehow they make it work. Taking a look at who they might be, Ansonia has 19,000 people, 6 square miles. I will also point out that the northwest corner of Ansonia, up behind the Nature Center, that's about 15 percent of our geographic area and it's owned by the State. We're looking at really not 6.2 square miles but 5.5 square miles in effect of population. Berlin, 19,000 people, 26 square miles, 3 Wards. East Lyme, 19,000 people, 24 square miles, 3 Wards. Madison, 18,000 people, 36 square miles, 2 voting districts. Monroe, 19,500 people, 26 square miles, 4 voting districts. New Canaan, Rocky Hill, Stonington, Waterford, all similar. Somewhere along the line these towns have managed to figure it out. They make it work with fewer than 7 Wards. I'd like to think that we can as well. One last note – take a look at Derby, 13,000 people, 5 square miles, 3 voting districts. Our friends to the north in Seymour, 16,500 people, 14 square miles, 3 Wards. And as I like to call it, our big brother Shelton, nearly 40,000 people, 30 square miles, 4 voting districts.

I appreciate your time; I know you folks have a lot to do tonight so thank you very much for your attention.

Robert Zuraw, 25 High Acres Road

First of all, have we ever had any problems with 7 Wards? Years ago we changed from five wards to seven. I don't understand why we have to do it again. With fewer people being able to run for office, are we going to have more primary elections? Do we have primaries in the City? I don't know. But if we're going to have to have primary elections where five or six people want to decide to run for two or three positions, are we going to have more elections? It just seems like we are doing something because other towns are doing it. We haven't had any problems in Ansonia. Why do we have to change? Again, it seems to me that we talked about retired people. Maybe those retired people who work at the polls need a few extra dollars. It might be good for them to get the money at Election Day. Again, why change something that's working? Thank you.

Adjournment

President Tripp asked three times if any other person wished to speak on the proposed Charter changes. Being none, he declared the public hearing adjourned at approximately 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia M. Bruder, Secretary
Ansonia Board of Aldermen