

BLOOMFIELD TOWN CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

There was a regular meeting of the above referenced subcommittee held on Saturday, April 27, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at Bloomfield Town Hall, 800 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, CT.

Committee Members: Joseph Suggs, Chair, Dwight Bolton, Elvin Turner, Bradley Klein, Erica Coleman (via phone)

Others present (in-person): Councilor Todd Cooper, Attorney Lawrence Widem, Crumbie Law Group, LLC

Virtual Attendance: Councilor Kenneth McClary

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m.

Public Comments

In-Person:

1. **Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Lane** asked the Commissioners to take the necessary time and attention that is needed to ensure an open, transparent and intentional Charter Revision process. She also asked the Commission to make decisions, not for just today but for the future of Bloomfield.
2. **Jennifer Marshall-Nealy, 57 Cliffmount Drive, Town Democratic Registrar** commented on the Town Charter, Chapter 2, Election of Officers, Section 201. She read the current charter language and made the following suggestion: Change the terms of office as an elected official from 2 years to 4 years and make it retroactive to January 2023. Mrs. Marshall-Nealy stated that the election of Registrar would take place in 2027, and thereafter every 4 years. She also commented on the work hours, job duties, and new early voting requirements.

Attorney Lawrence Widem of Crumbie Law Group clarified that the Town can't change the term of office to be retroactive. If approved, changes could occur with the next municipal election.

3. **Roger Bunker, 28 Old Village Road** inquired about the timing for the Charter Revision process. He asked if the Commission has plans to complete this initiative in time to be placed on the November 2024 presidential ballot.
4. **Bonnie Bercowetz, 492 Park Avenue** asked if the Commissioners would consider adding public comments at the end of the agenda as well, to give the public another opportunity to comment on the meeting after hearing discussions. In addition, she also stressed the importance of community engagement and information sharing with the public.

Virtual:

1. **Ava Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road** briefly commented on the role of the library as a town department, by providing services, support and guardianship of free speech rights. She noted that it is not easy to balance the library's core mission within the structure of the Town Charter. Mrs. Biffer will provide additional comments in writing regarding her Charter Revision suggestions.

Review and Discussion of Comments received by the Commission

Chairman Suggs gave a brief overview of public comments that have been received via e-mail along with Town Council charges. He suggested beginning review of these comments at the next regularly scheduled meeting Thursday, May 17, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioner Klein stated that he read the public submissions to date and noted that they were a little difficult to process, as is the Town Charter itself. He also commented on the difficulty in understanding the differences between government structure and policy outcomes. Commissioner Klein cautioned the Commission relative to dive into substantive policy as opposed to the structure of decision-making. He also mentioned that he found several grammatical and syntactical errors in the Town Charter that should be addressed and corrected as well.

Councilor Kenneth McClary thanked the Commission members for their continued service to the Bloomfield community. He responded to comments regarding the legitimacy of the revision process. He expressed appreciation for conducting Commission meetings on Saturdays, to provide more opportunities for public engagement and participation in this process. Councilor McClary noted the Charter Revision webpage on the Town's website, which has a plethora of information relative to this process, resources, and future engagement efforts.

Councilor Cooper applauded the efforts of the Commission thus far. He noted that the Town Charter has not been reviewed or revised in the past 18 years. It is best practice in the municipal sector to conduct this review every 10 years. For the Town of Bloomfield, this review is long overdue, and he is looking forward to participating in and supporting this process.

Commissioner Turner inquired about the top Council priorities relative to this charter revision process. The focus should reflect consideration about governance structure and possible constraints, in terms of future plans for the Town of Bloomfield. The Council approved 15 Commission charges of those what is constraining the Town to conduct business. This would be useful information for the Commission to be aware of.

Attorney Widem addressed the questions and concerns posed by the Commission. He explained the differences between policy and structure and how they are also interconnected. The Council approved 15 Commission charges to consider for revision of the Town Charter. It was noted that the Commission is not bound by any of those charges. However, if in disagreement with any of the Council charges, the Commission should articulate

why in their final draft report. The Commission could consider changes with form of government, small/large structural issues, budgetary process, administrative officers, terms of office, etc.

Attorney Widem also commented on some restraints of the Charter Revision Commission:

- Municipal powers are only permitted under state statute, consistent with the State Constitution.
- Board of Education – Separate municipal agency of the Town
- Existing Contracts – amending the Town Charter, not retroactive, any Town commitment beforehand stays.
- Personnel Obligations – employee arrangements

The Commission inquired about their authority to conduct outreach to various town departments, directors, and board/commission members. It is important to document these interactions and all communications relative to this process when engaging with these entities and the public.

Attorney Widem also clarified the Town's relationship with the two fire districts in Town, Blue Hills Fire and Bloomfield Center Fire. Both fire districts are separate independent municipal corporations. The Town does not have any authority to abolish them, there is nothing in the Town Charter to rearrange and recreate them. The Commission can suggest establishing an overall Fire Chief or Public Safety Director.

He also commented on regional authorities such as the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and Capitol Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) that are bound by a special act and/or state statute. The Town can set forth policy of how much the regionalization should Bloomfield be engaged in such as sharing of resources, personnel with surrounding towns.

Commissioner Suggs noted that at the next scheduled meeting, the Commissioners will begin review, discuss, develop a consensus of those sections of the Town Charter that Council has suggested. The Commission will continue to receive public input throughout this process.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Bolton, seconded by Commissioner Klein and voted unanimously to approve the minutes of March 23, 2024, and April 18, 2024, with noted corrections.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.