

## Town Charter Revision Commission Meeting – Saturday, July 13, 2024

### Public Comments

#### In-Person:

1. **Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Lane** commented on previous meeting discussions regarding the following proposed charter revisions:
  - The Council – She clarified how the Mayor and Deputy Mayor were selected in previous Councils, through Democratic caucus discussions and highest vote getter.
  - Council Compensation – If the Council receives compensation, then all other elected officials should receive compensation. All elected officials cannot get back their time, talent, and overall energy to the Town of Bloomfield. She noted that the form of compensation should be like BVA tax abatement. Mrs. DeBeatham-Brown cautioned the Commission to be careful of the decisions of today will have far reaching consequences tomorrow and years to come.
2. **Councilor Joseph Merritt, 31 Woods Road** expressed agreement with the following revisions:
  - The referendum on the budget, reducing number of signatures required to 1.5% of registered voters (tax increase of more than 3%).
  - He also noted that the state law requires no more than two-thirds of one political party to be represented, elected, or appointed to the committee, recommend increasing to two-thirds.
  - Councilor Merritt also stated the 15% provision referendum vote, good to limit the number of voters no change, charter language should be clarified.
  - Town Manager – Residency requirements, it is important to search and encourage more people and other towns to consider Bloomfield. He expressed and questioned the opinion of the Town Attorney noting that residency can be redefined to where you spend most of your time. He recommends changing it to allow individuals to live nearby.
  - Library – this system is working and functioning well. No reason to change at all.
  - Voting Districts – the Town is too small for voting by district.
3. **Rickford Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane** emphasized the critical importance of maintaining an independent structure of the town public library, as a cornerstone of open democracy. The Town Manager has budgetary oversight, recommended no change.

#### Virtual:

1. **Elizabeth Lane, 33 Burnwood Drive, Library Director** commented on the following proposed revisions:
  - Town Manager residency requirement is unnecessary. The Town should prioritize selecting an excellent town manager.

- Chapter 6 – Section 604 – Department of Library Services, commented on the Best Practices CT Public Libraries from the CT State Library Board noting that exemplary libraries the governing Board has the authority to hire and fire the Library Director.
- The Library Board and Town Manager structure of reporting is a very effective way to best deliver library services while protecting first amendment rights.

2. **Dr. James Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road** submitted written comments to the Commission. (Click link to review: <https://ct-bloomfield.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/3792/jbiffere-mail>)

However, he highlighted some discussion points in Chapters 3 and 5 of the Town Charter:

- Referendum on certain ordinances or appropriations – suggested a range of 2,3 or 4%.
- Section 308b – clarified to a couple of trivial sentences a couple of trivial ideas. He noted that 15% of voters must have voted and passed by simple majority.
- Section 502a – suggested that “preference be given to qualified Bloomfield residents”.
- Section 502d – Town Manager always had authority to remove any Director, including the Library Director. He noted the importance of evaluating and understanding all the distinct functions of these departments which require specific knowledge and experience.
- Section 604 – Minimize the intrusion of politics into protection of fundamental first amendment rights. The Library Board of Trustees has the right to remove the Library Director as well.

3. **Linda Pagani, 4 Guernsey Road** commented on the best interests of Bloomfield citizens and the patrons of the library to maintain this higher standard of governance regarding the election of the Library Board of Trustees. She noted that this elective system has been working and should remain in place. Mrs. Pagani wants to be able to vote for the people who make policy for one of our indispensable community resources.

*Chairman Suggs mentioned that Commissioners have decided to allow additional public comments after discussion of agenda items, beginning with this meeting and moving forward on future meeting agendas. Limiting additional responses to 2 minutes.*

## **Public Comments – Part II**

1. **Councilor Joseph Merritt, 31 Woods Road** was pleased that the Commission decided to lower the percent requirement for signatures to get a referendum on the budget. He urged the Commission to establish a limit of a tax increase, like a 2 or 3%. Councilor Merritt prefers a 3% requirement, and only if there's an increase in the budget by the Town Council of more than 3%.
2. **Rickford Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane** commented on clarifying the charter language on residency requirements for the Town Manager. He expressed agreement to open the recruitment process to applicants that do not reside in Bloomfield.

The Town Treasurer position has no value. It is a patronage position by any political party to appoint someone. The Finance Department staff do all the work, so there is no value.

Should there be a recommendation from the Library Board of Trustees regarding any issue with the Library Director, who reports to the Council, the Town Manager? In this town, the Library Board of Trustees usually functions nonpolitical, even though they are political. So, the library system works well, with no changes to the current charter language.

3. **Suzette DeBeatham**-Brown noted the importance of the Library Board of Trustees to make the decision regarding the Library Director. If they are the ones that hire the Library Director, there is a problem, they can make a recommendation. But, to arbitrarily take that decision-making process from the Library Board of Trustees would be a wrong thing.

Mrs. DeBeatham-Brown is also in agreement with the Commission's recommendation regarding residency requirements for the Town Manager position. She believes that everyone that works for the town needs to live in the town and spend their money in the town, but that is not possible.

She also commented on the residency points given to Bloomfield residents if they are applying for a position within the Town. She thanked the Commission for the wonderful intentional conversation that was had here today, and she believes that intention will continue throughout this entire process.

## **Virtual**

1. **Ava Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road, Chair of the Library Board of Trustees** commented and clarified some details regarding the roles of the Library Board of Trustees and the Town Manager. Mrs. Biffer also submitted written comments via e-mail to the Commission. Click link to review:

<https://ct-bloomfield.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/3790/abiffere-mail>

- The board does determine compensation for the library director. The board only has the power to appoint a Library Director. Mrs. Biffer also submitted written comments detailing this issue of concern.
- Once the library director has been appointed, also in conjunction with the Human Resources Department. They attend all interviews, collection of hiring paperwork, present resumes, and letters of intent to review, etc. The Board cooperates with Human Resources on the hiring, although the decision is made by the Board. Once an appointment is chosen, the Town Manager and Human Resources present the offer letter and benefits package to the person that has been selected.
- She also commented on the take of performance evaluation of the Library Director. In the past, it appears that no Town Director was evaluated annually by Town Managers, and we felt that since we could be called upon in certain circumstances, hopefully not to dismiss a Director, we would absolutely have to have factual grounds for doing so. If there was no evaluation, that would be a problem. The Library Board of Trustees work with the Library Director as part of the whole evaluative process to set goals and then, evaluate, measure both factually and in terms of community response. It was noted that department uses standard practices in evaluation that most management models approve.

Mrs. Biffer commented on the possibility of us working together with a town manager is an interesting proposal. The Library Board of Trustees would be interested to hear the Town Attorney's opinion regarding the clear differences in language in the Charter.

She further commented on internal policies with the library collection and these policies are never in conflict with town policy. An immediate referral to the Town Attorney for review and suggestion.

2. **Linda Pagani, 4 Guernsey Road** thanked the Commissioners for their volunteer efforts over the summer months in serving on this commission. She also thanked Chairman Suggs for his leadership in the way he conducts meetings.