

Comments for Charter Revision Committee

08/03/2024

Dr. James Biffer

Thank you for the opportunity to again comment.

You left 2 large areas of concern open from your Wednesday meeting: compensation of elected officials, and election of a mayor separate from the other 8 Councilors.

As to compensation, we have already discussed the can of worms that would open. Since the BOE, TPZ, ZBA, and Library Trustees have no mechanism for voting themselves any compensation, that would fall to the Council. Can you imagine the Council, many of whom do not even understand their own positions, deciding on the relative worth of other elected officials? As I said on Wednesday, the Council could decide they get a tax break and \$10,000, but Mr. Bolton and the TPZ get \$1.49, and the BOE gets \$6.50. You see how fast this gets really ridiculous. But the bigger issue is that public service should be the motivation and the calling, not the power or personal aggrandizement. The inability to get quality volunteers has nothing to do with unpaid positions; you all know it is a product of the political environment here in Bloomfield. With such a lopsided voter registration, we all know that nomination by the DTC is tantamount to election. Yes, there have been a few recent primary challenges, but by and large the DTC nominations get elected. You all know many good, honest, hard-working citizens who would make great public servants, but who are unwilling to sell their soul, character, and honor to get nominated. It has nothing to do with money. Bloomfield has enjoyed generations of phenomenal elected officials who all served without pay. The fact that this Council even thought of being compensated betrays their mindset, that they are somehow special. You all heard one Councilor compare himself to firefighters, and therefore deserving of a tax break. Are you kidding me? Volunteers who run into burning buildings to help fellow citizens is almost the same as being on the Council. Get real! In addition, there are whole classes of volunteers we have discussed who contribute far more time, money, and effort than Councilors. Unless you are going to pay all the parents of athletes, parents of musicians and artists, every PTO member, and many other civically active citizens, you cannot pay Councilors. And you certainly cannot let them set their own compensation: it's wrong when Congress does it, it's wrong when State Legislators do it, and it would be wrong here. I would leave section 301 and 701 as is, NO COMPENSATION. If you think you must include an option, then you should delineate that ANYTHING the Council gives themselves, is also IMMEDIATELY given to the BOE, TPZ, ZBA, and Library Trustees. That still ignores all the other groups I mentioned, but at least there would be equity among elected officials.

For section 302 on the mayor, the same problem arises. The mayor is 1 of only 9 EQUAL votes on the Council. We already see problems with some people thinking the mayor is

special. The mayor is NOT. They are simply the chair of Council meetings, plus some ceremonial duties and privileges. A separate election implies there is something special about the mayor, which there is NOT. All the backbiting, political maneuvering, and bullet voting will not go away, and it could be worse. What if the mayor ran on a different platform than the other 8 elected Councilors? What does that accomplish? Plus, you cannot create the perception that the Mayor of Bloomfield is anything like Mayor of New Britain or Hartford, which a separate campaign and election would imply. To prevent the shenanigans of a few years ago, you could simply specify that the highest vote-getter is given the ceremonial title of mayor, 2nd highest is deputy mayor, in section 302 and leave it at that.

I will have 2 more comments later in your meeting. Thank you.