

Town of Greenwich
Board of Selectmen
Public Hearing Board of Education Charter Revision
March 15, 2017
6:00 P.M.
Town Hall Meeting Room

APPROVED MINUTES

The meeting opened at 6:09 P.M. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

- a. Attendance:
 - I. First Selectman Peter J. Tesei -Present
 - II. Selectman John Toner –Present
 - III. Selectman Drew Marzullo —Present
- b. The audience included approximately 100 people.

Following the Pledge, Mr. Tesei greeted and welcomed attendees commenting that it was a Public Hearing on the proposed change to the method of election to the Board of Education. He reviewed the process that the Board of Selectmen initiated to explore the issue: appointment of a 5-member Selectman's Board of Education Charter Revision Committee which included Joan Caldwell (R), William Finger (D), Brian Peldunas (R), Barry Rickert (U) and Peter von Braun (R) that held seventeen (17) meetings over the course of their charge. The Committee's Report was had been submitted and was available to the public in hardcopy on the table next to the Speaker Sign-In Forms and online on the Town's website.

Mr. Tesei expressed his thanks to the Committee and noted that the RTM had recommended consideration of the issue in 2015. He added that the Board of Selectmen had discussed the issue at its Regular Meeting on March 9, 2017. He reminded the audience of Greenwich's tradition of civility, respect and tolerance and expected that the evening's discourse would maintain that practice.

Mr. Marzullo remarked that he would be calling names of the Speakers, alternating between speakers who were in favor of the Charter Revision and those opposed to revising the Charter. Each speaker would have a limit of three (3) minutes to speak and would receive a warning at two and a half minutes (2.5) that they had (30) seconds to complete their remarks.

SPEAKERS LIST & OPINIONS EXPRESSED

Karen Fassuliotis – In Support of Charter Revision – citing that the change would provide additional choice, accountability and promote competitive elections.

Gerald Pollack – In Opposition to Charter Revision– citing that the change would disrupt the “balanced board” where cooperation and consultation preceded voting. He recommended

simplifying the process for unaffiliated voters getting on the ballot.

Linda Moshier – In Support of Charter Revision – agreed with Ms. Fassuliotis’ remarks concerning the need for revising the Charter to change the BOE election process.

Sandy Waters – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (previous BOE Chair) remarked that the BOE was nonpartisan and successfully reflected the goals of the Committee for accountability, choice, and engagement in its current election process.

Fred DeCaro – In Support of Charter Revision - (Republican Registrar of Voters) in favor of allowing each vote to count so that the candidate with the most votes wins election.

Lucy Krasnor – In Opposition to Charter Revision – citing the composition of the Committee did not make for neutral fact-finding and recommended increasing choice and accountability by reducing the number of signatures needed by unaffiliated voters to get on the ballot.

Paul Olmsted – In Support of Charter Revision – (3 children in public school system, RTM D-5) cited the Committee vote of 4-1 (in favor of Charter Revision) with 17 recommendations as sound process to achieve conclusions.

Stephen Walko – In Support of Charter Revision – (NL Building Committee, children in public schools) agreed that Revision would offer accountability and choice.

Jeff Ramer – In Opposition to Charter Revision – offered that a balanced, bi-partisan Board was good for taking the politics out of education.

Elizabeth Peldunas – In Support of Charter Revision – suggested the revision would improve the process and recommended that TOG should work for a change in legislation to include unaffiliated voters.

John Blankley – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (children and grandchildren in public schools, BET member) expressed the opinion that change would be deleterious to the process of electing members of the Board of Education.

Don Whyko – In Support of Charter Revision – (RTM D-12) in favor of revision and would prefer adding members to the BOE to elect an uneven number of members.

Ed Mendelsohn – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (parent) prefers a balanced Board so that it is not politicized; concerned that unaffiliated voters are effectively disenfranchised.

Peter von Braun – In Support of Charter Revision – (former BOE member) cited no change in BOE structure in 50 years whereas School budget had increased yet test scores were poor, thus demanding substantial change.

Michael Baumgarten – In Opposition to Charter Revision – concerned that changing BOE election process would be a distraction, increase difficulty of hiring a new Superintendent and that it would be risky to experiment something that might impact Greenwich’s high standards.

Rosa Fini, MD – In Support of Charter Revision – affirms that because it eliminates party bias, it will engage the interest of best candidates.

Gaetane Francis – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (current member of BOE) prefers current structure because members are not accountable to party or political platforms. Recommends engaging unaffiliated voters by lowering number of petition signatures requirements.

Timothy Alexander – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (grandparent of public school students) concerned that the consequences of changing the process are unknown.

Randall Smith – In Support of Charter Revision – (parent, RTC member) concerned that TOG spends more per pupil than comparable towns yet student score below peers. Feels the BOE is the problem because they are not accountable.

Patti Jomo – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (PTA president) concerned that altering the BOE election process would increase probability of partisan Board.

Ed Dadakis – In Support of Charter Revision – (RTC) concerned that the current structure of the BOE has created a dysfunctional situation which can only be corrected by increasing voter choice of candidates.

Izzy Baird – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (former Youth Commission member and public school graduate) concerned that an unbalanced Board would be a rubber stamp and not interested in the common good.

Jason Auerbach – In Support of Charter Revision - (public school parent, RTM member) commented that change would invigorate the BOE and encourage more voter participation and accountability of BOE members.

Michael Trogni – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (PTAC member) CT PTA resolution favors nonpartisan Boards. Recommends pursuing CT for legislation to allow unaffiliated voters to participate.

Bob Brady – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (former RTM Education Cmte member, public school parent) favors bi-partisan Board that is forced to work collegially in temporary coalitions to serve the community. Recommend taking no action to change Charter.

Peter Sherr – In Support of Charter Revision – (parent public school students, BOE Chair) concerned that the current model is controlled by party politics while the Revision would increase democracy through more voter choice.

Susan Jaffee – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (Riverside resident) concerned about current voting practice that candidate with greatest number of votes doesn't always get seated on BOE. Recommends shadow apprenticeship in preparation for becoming a BOE candidate.

Michael Mason – In Support of Charter Revision – (parent of public school student, BET Chair) in favor of choice and accountability. Recognizes that there will be further discussion because the issue will go to RTM where a community conversation will take place.

Christine Edwards – In Opposition to Charter Change – prefers a balanced Board to maintain the principle of democratic rights.

Hillary Gunn – In Support of Charter Change – (RTM D-7 Co-Chair) concerned that under current structure the voter is disenfranchised. Eager to support during RTM voting.

Richard DiPreta – In Support of Charter Change – agrees that revision would improve choice, engagement and accountability. Would prefer a modified Glastonbury model that would allow the total number of seats to be filled by candidates with the highest votes.

William Finger – In Opposition to Charter Change – (former BET member, BOE Charter Revision Committee member) in favor of maintaining the status quo because of concern that the change is being rushed and that there is misinformation about the process. Recommends RTC lower number of petition signatures required for unaffiliated voters to be candidates; a League of Women Voters study or debate; and, additional public debate rather than Hearings.

Ann Wichman – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (teacher, parent, grandparent, RTM Education Committee) in favor of balanced Board because it requires building consensus.

Christopher von Keyserling – In Support of Charter Revision – (RTM D-8 Chair) suggests that Revision is a false dilemma between the status quo and the Glastonbury model which offers the solution to the problem of accountability.

Leslie Moriarty – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (BET member, former BOE member) favors a bi-partisan Board where all have an equal voice and must discuss and collaborate.

Mike Spilo – In Support of Charter Revision – (RTM D-11) favors data driven approach that indicates Greenwich Public School ranking has dropped and would benefit from a BOE with more accountability.

Nick Edwards – In Opposition to Charter Revision – concerned that the proposed Revision doesn't foster opportunity. Favors maintaining a balanced Board but recommends continuing the conversation and expanding the number of people engaged in potentially revising BOE elections.

Polly Young – In Support of Charter Revision – (parent of public school children) wants additional voter choice to make BOE more accountable.

Clare Kilgallen – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (parent, PTA, NL Building Committee) concerned that party nominated candidates will disrupt the bi-partisan BOE.

Rosemary Hyson – In Opposition to Charter Revision – in favor of expanding candidate pool with unaffiliated voters.

Laura Gunn – In Support of Charter Revision – favors more competition to attract best qualified candidates.

Andy Burke – In Opposition to Charter Revision – concerned that policy choice is unclear and would prefer no action at this time.

Phil Gunn - In Support of Charter Revision – cited issue of a balanced Board struggling to affect a coalition to make progress toward a vote.

Martin Mushkin - In Opposition to Charter Revision – (parent, grandparent of public school students) believes that the Committee Report finds solutions to a problem that doesn't exist. Opposed to party politics interfering with the quality of education.

Katie Yu – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (Ms. Yu read a statement from Karen Hirsh, Western Middle School PTA co-President) – remarked that the Charter change would not be beneficial because the intent was to increase size of BOE which overstepped the bounds of BOE Strategic Plan.

Mr. Tesei corrected incorrect information about the scheduling of the Public Hearing by reading the published Press Release of March 13 and 14, 2017 and TOG's website announcement. He added that the process for considering the BOE Election Charter Revision began in January 2015.

Lindsey Fahey – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (parent of public school students) noted that members of the BOE did not consider themselves crossing party lines to make decisions and that the balanced Board had a firmer commitment to high standards for Greenwich schools.

Joanna Swanky – In Opposition to Charter Revision – recommended reading Mr. Finger's analysis of BOE and suggestions for remedies.

Don Conway – In Opposition to Charter Revision – (RTM member) in favor of BOE being more involved in selecting a new Superintendent; questioned whether teachers were staying too long in their positions which doesn't benefit students.

Mr. Tesei expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the audience for attending and expressing their opinions. He asked Mr. Fox, TOG Town Attorney, to comment on the legal process for Charter revision. Mr. Tesei indicated that the Committee had done its work, presented its recommendations to the Board of Selectmen, who now saw their options as: do nothing; Amend the recommendations, or approve the Report and forward it to the RTM. He reminded the audience that by practice, the RTM doesn't move an issue at a single meeting.


Mr. Marzullo asked for clarification of the vote which would be taken by the BOS at their meeting on March 17, 2017 at 3:00 P.M. Mr. Tesei responded that they would be voting to accept or reject the recommendation of the Committee.

Mr. Tesei referred the question to Mr. Fox for response. Mr. Fox agreed with the process steps summarized provided by Mr. Tesei. He noted that if the RTM made any changes in the language of the Committee's text resolution, that it matter would return to the BOS for further discussion. He commented that the timing of the adoption would be that it takes effect six (6) months after an RTM vote, which in all probability means 2019.

Meeting adjourned: 8:47 P.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Peter J. Tesei", written above a horizontal line.

Peter J. Tesei
First Selectman

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Catherine Sidor", written above a horizontal line.
Prepared by Catherine Sidor
Recording Secretary