

# Town of Greenwich

Selectmen's Board of Education Charter Revision Committee

Meeting 1 November 2016

7:00 p.m.

Hayton Room in Town Hall

## MINUTES

### 1. The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m.

#### a. Attendance:

I. Committee members: Joan Caldwell (Chair), Barry Rickert, William Finger, Peter von Braun, Brian Peldunas (Secretary) – Present.

II. Former Board of Education Chairs: Nancy Weissler, Genny Krob, Colleen Giambo, Steve Anderson, Sandy Waters, Dick Kriskey, Leslie Moriarty

III. Other attendees included: Irene Dietrich, Ken Borsuk, Tod Laudonia, Richard DiPreta, Paul Olmsted, Chris Von Keyserling, Chris Sandys, Peter Tesei, Mark Prunier, Bob Brady, Rebecca Steinfeld

### 2. Minutes

Minutes for meetings on 4 Oct, 18 Oct, and 25 Oct were discussed, amended and approved (after the discussion with invited guests). For 4 October: motion of Mr. von Braun, seconded by Mr. Rickert, vote of 5-0; for 18 October: motion of Mr. Finger, seconded by Mr. Rickert, vote of 4-0 (Ms. Caldwell had been absent; for 25 October: motion of Mr. Finger, seconded by Mr. Rickert, vote of 5-0.

### 3. Discussion with invited guests – Former Board of Education Chairs.

Mr. Peldunas provided a brief introduction to the proposal to revise the Town Charter relating to the Board of Education (“BoE”). Ms. Waters asked what is driving the change and what is particular about the BoE versus other town boards (i.e., BET). Mr. Rickert explained the original effort put to the RTM was to encourage openness in elections. Other comments and questions by the committee members were interjected throughout the discussion (Caldwell: how do we include unaffiliated voters in the process, should the BoE have an odd number of members or have a tie breaking vote for the chair, the town political parties provide a mechanism for vetting candidates, what is the impact of a change of bosses every two years on the superintendent; Von Braun: what is the primary function of the BoE, current structure has Democrats running against Democrats and Republicans running against Republicans; Mr. Finger: function provided by state statutes, how does an increase in size increase accountability, does the tag of “petition candidate” create disadvantage for those running under that title, education should not be political/politicized; Mr. Rickert: process is tough for unaffiliated voters and candidates; Mr. Peldunas: are any topics not brought to the BoE for discussion because they might end in a 4-4 tie.

The former BoE Chairs provided their input:

- Ms. Waters: in favor of competitive elections (critical to give public a say, unaffiliated should have more opportunity), changing the size of the board is a bad idea (prolong discussions, diminish quality of the candidates and members, hard to recruit qualified candidates), would support a non-partisan board, what is proposed won't improve quality of candidates, good board members are smart, independent and have spine, parties are passive recruiters
- Ms. Giambo: real flaw not having unaffiliated voters involved, 10 members would be too many, need to consider impact on superintendent, issues should be decided in public meetings, not in caucus, superintendent would not raise topic which might end in 4-4 tie.
- Ms. Krob – provided historical background, change in board size would not solve all problems, asked if committee had spoken with other area boards, how change would impact end goal of BoE, if there was any research on optimal size of boards and on board effectiveness, what is the metric of dissatisfaction with the board prompting the proposal, suggest odd number of members.
- Ms. Weissler- mission of BoE is to improve achievement in a cost effective manner, the proposed change would lead to more accountability and more choice, issues normally don't break down along party lines, larger board could handle larger workload, better committee structure, attract more candidates, and allow for constant engagement, even with possibility of partisan board, you can't predict outcome.
- Mr. Anderson – not in favor of expanding except to go to nine members, ten members could swing back and forth between partisan and neutral, would like to compare to other districts, only example of tie vote was to opt into Stamford for magnet elementary school, any board member can raise topic, but five have to agree to get on agenda, RTC and DTC have process in place for vetting.
- Mr. Kriskey – RTC interviewed 13 people in 2011 to determine candidates
- Ms. Moriarty – understands the desire for competitive elections, but need to be aware of possible unintended consequences; can't compare BET and BoE since decisions are not made on same basis, 8 to 10 would be a significant change with communication complexity increase, BoE does not operate on committee basis, everyone wants to talk with others, with BET and committee structure, others not on committee are not fully informed

Other comments:

- Mr. Prunier: not concerned with Republican domination as BoE is responsive to parents, the majority could change (e.g., there have been Democratic First Selectmen), most endorsees are not "party people"
- Mr. Brady: interested in how we can get unaffiliated people to run, or a non-partisan ballot
- Mr. von Keyserling: if neither party has a majority, there is no responsibility and no blame, the RTC and DTC interests are not for the community but for the party; if one party were in charge, then they would take an interest in education

and the parties would be more active, people involved in education are not “party people,” the process is not politicized enough.

- Ms. Steinfeld: (former candidate) the DTC did know her as a party person, if you make it more political, the endorsement becomes more of a reward
- Ms. Dietrich: the key is the selection process, a willingness to listen and dedication.
- Mr. Olmsted: what is in place now is a quota system which is unfair and undemocratic, the focus should be on the voters of Greenwich, even the proposed change is a quota system
- Mr. Sandys: some party affiliation helps get name out, and parties can help raise money

There was a general discussion on the impact of a ten person board on the superintendent. Mr. Ladounia said most of the superintendents who left moved onto other superintendent jobs. Ms. Weissler indicated the job was demanding.

#### **4. Review and Discussion**

Mr. Finger asked whether the public can raise a special act for consideration by the state legislature.

Mr. von Braun made a motion to adopt a “mission” for the committee to be used as a concrete basis for measuring proposals against. Mr. Peldunas seconded the motion. A general discussion followed about the need for a mission statement for the committee. The suggestion was to adopt a set of guiding principles.

Mr. Tesei read the current BoE description: “The Board of Education is the governing body of the District, and shall govern the District in such a manner that it sets the national standard for governance, oversight, public engagement and stewardship of the public education system.”

After discussion it was agreed this met the needs of the committee. Mr. von Braun withdrew his original motion. A motion was made to adopt the current BoE description as the guiding principles. Mr. Rickert seconded the motion. The vote recorded by the Secretary was 5-0, although Mr. von Braun believes he voted no.

Ms. Caldwell was going to follow up with the Law Department.

#### **5. Discussion of guidelines for public hearing.**

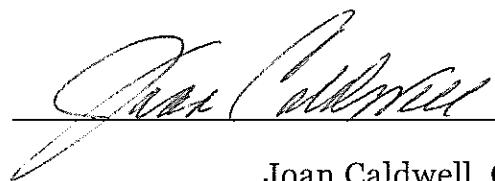
The committee discussed advertising for the public forum to be held 9 November. Mr. Peldunas was asked to pursue the advertising as suggested (newspapers, RTC, DTC, PTAC, etc.). Given the potential turnout, the Employee Lounge might not be sufficient, so Mr. Peldunas was asked to inquire about the Library auditorium and Central Middle School Auditorium (CMS would require the end of the meeting by 9:00 PM if no cost was to be incurred).

The committee discussed ground rules for the public forum, such as a sign up sheet and a time limit. It was agreed to wait until a count of interested speakers was obtained until a time limit was set.

## **6. Adjournment**


On a motion by Mr. von Braun, seconded by Mr. Rickert, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

The public forum is planned for 9 November at a location to be determined.



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Joan Caldwell, Chair



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Prepared by Brian Peldunas, Secretary