

Town of Greenwich

Selectmen's Board of Education Charter Revision Committee

Meeting 20 December 2016

7:00 p.m.

Town Hall – Mazza Room

DRAFT MINUTES

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

a. Attendance:

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

Members of the public: Jeff Ramer, Bob Brady, Irene Dietrich, Chris von Keyserling

2. Minutes

The minutes of the 7 December 2016 meeting were reviewed, amended and approved by a vote of 5-0.

3. Discussion of input received from Law Department.

The committee discussed the follow up conversations had between Mr. Fox (Town of Greenwich Law Department) and Mr. Finger regarding special acts and validating acts of the State Legislature in relation to the possibility of a non-partisan BoE. Mr. Fox's opinion was that a special act would not pass the legislature. After further discussion, the committee recommended, by motion of Mr. Rickert, seconded by Mr. Finger, that "the Town obtain a second opinion in writing from outside counsel in regard to whether a non-partisan board can be achieved via special act or other means." The vote was 4-1, Mr. von Braun voting no.

4. Discussion of input received from past and current Superintendent search firms.

Mr. Finger and Mr. Rickert spoke with Bill Attea, whose firm conducted the search for the previous superintendent, on 13 December 2016. He expressed the following opinions, based on his experience: the current review of the BoE election process (charter change) would make it harder to recruit candidates, but would not impact those who applied on their own; superintendents prefer odd numbers (5,7,9) and larger is not better; advised not to go to ten; eight is an unusual number; party affiliation makes it harder to change caucus leanings; party affiliation hinders objectivity; parties do not make the board difficult in Greenwich, it is the individual members; changing in the middle of a search is not good; Greenwich should make selection of superintendent first, then make charter change; Greenwich should focus on what is best for the students .

Mr. Finger and Mr. Rickert spoke with Mike Rush, whose firm is conducting the search for the current superintendent, on 15 December 2016. He expressed the following opinions, based on his experience: Greenwich should do the search before or after a charter change decision is made, with a preference to do it after the search; prefers non-partisan board; an odd number and fewer members are preferred to an even number and a larger board; and Greenwich should not make a change unless it was for the better. Mr. Finger and Mr. Rickert spoke with Mike Rush and Gary Ray, of the search firm, on 20 December 2016. They (primarily Mr. Ray) expressed the following opinions: a good candidate would not be dissuaded by a change or by the size of the board; the search firm could manage the expectations of candidates; an odd (5,7,9) number is preferable to the unusual number of eight; in order of preference: non-partisan, odd number, majority even (Glastonbury model); they will let us know if it is impacting recruiting

5. Review of information gathered from other sources.

No additional information was gathered in the previous week.

6. Discussion of remaining structures and other options.

Each of the members expressed their thoughts about the options on the table (status quo, charge option (expand from 8 to 10), odd number of members (7 or 9), eight members with elections of 3 and 5, eight members with chair having tiebreak, and (pending further discussion with the Law Department) non-partisan board).

Mr. Rickert: eight members would be better if they were elected 5 and 3 to provide competition and were forced to engage with the unaffiliated voters; it would provide more voter choice; no longer in favor of ten member board, and not in favor of a tiebreak vote for the chair as it would not promote choice.

Mr. von Braun: an unbalanced board makes sense for better functioning of the board; divisive votes/issues get submerged before reaching a board vote; in favor of smaller number of members as it would allow recruiting of better people.

Mr. Finger: Mr. Finger: it would be a bad move to play with the charter unless the change was certain to accomplish the specific results intended; wants to promote choice and competition; strong believer in a non-partisan structure; with change being discussed unaffiliated voters might still be disenfranchised; major education effort needed via LWV, PTAC, RTC and DTC; in favor of status quo, but would be interested in incremental recommendations to change process before resorting to a charter change.

Mr. Peldunas: will weigh choices on several measures: opening endorsement process, voter choice, accountability, impact on unaffiliated voters, non-partisan election and working of board, and education needs. In favor of odd number of members (7 or 9), followed by eight members with elections of 3 and 5.

Ms. Caldwell: in favor of eight members with elections of 3 and 5; would put pressure on parties and electorate to be involved (“get going”), allows voters to decide: if they want balance on the board, it allows balance.

Follow up actions: Mr. Rickert to define the workings of the “Glastonbury model” (eight members with elections of 3 and 5); Ms. Caldwell to talk with Mr. Tesei about obtaining opinion from outside counsel.

Possible recommendations: recommend RTC go from 5% to 1% signature requirements, overall need for more education of voters, need for education about recruitment of non-partisan (should this be unaffiliated?) voters to run for board.

7. Approval of minutes.

The minutes of the 7 December 2016 meeting were reviewed and amended. The minutes as amended were approved by motion of Mr. von Braun, seconded by Mr. Finger, vote of 5-0.

8. Adjourn.

Mr. von Braun made a motion to adjourn at 8:33, seconded by Mr. Finger.