

May 6, 2015

The Stonington Board of Selectmen held a special meeting on this date at the Stonington High School Commons at 7:00pm. Present were First Selectman George Crouse, Selectman Rob Simmons and Selectman Michael Spellman. Also present were members of the public and press.

**(1) Call to Order**

Mr. Crouse called the meeting to order at 7:00p.m.

**(2) Comments from the Public**

None

**(3) New Business**

**Request for Additional Appropriation for Snow Removal Expenditures**

Mr. Sullivan, Interim Finance Director presented the three line items that have been requested. Mr. Simmons moved to approve the appropriations for snow removal expenditure to be sent to the Board of Finance, seconded by Mr. Spellman, all in favor 3-0, motion approved.

**(4) Public Hearing - Discuss Charter Revision Commission's Amendments to the Charter**

- Glenn Frishman, chair of the Board of Finance stated that he believes the present system is not broken. Members are vetted by town committees. Mr. Frishman stated it is very easy for an unaffiliated voter to gain a spot on the ballot. Mr. Frishman spoke about the successes of the board of finance in his years. Mr. Frishman stated that the current system forces compromise and has never had a tie broken by the Town Clerk.
- Cindy Ladwig, Town Clerk spoke regarding the terms of the Town Clerk and the Tax Collector. They had requested the terms of these positions be extended to four years, by state code they may grant up to six year terms. Due to the constant change of law, there is a great deal of knowledge that must be gained on the job. There is a large learning curve to train a new employee therefore giving more stability to the position will make the town more efficient. Mr. Simmons questioned whether an indefinite appointment would serve the department well.
- Linda Camelio, Tax Collector stated that many towns are moving towards appointed officials. Ms. Camelio stated that it takes three years of education to become certified therefore it is inefficient to have a two year term. Treating these positions as professional employment allows for the time for education and training.
- Marsha Standish, Tax Assessor spoke regarding a change in the letter submitted with the charter. Ms. Standish stated that Tax Assessor positions are appointed and would serve the Town Clerk and Tax Collector well to have the same. Ms. Standish spoke regarding duties of the tax assessor and the benefit of the change in the charter enabling the assessor to become a department head.

- Bryan Bentz, member of the board of finance stated that he believes these changes will introduce partisanship to the board. He believes this will be a large problem for the board in the future considering the board has been largely bipartisan with three democrat members and three republican members. Mr. Bentz stated that the board of finance's decisions must come before the public before a decision is made. Mr. Bentz recommended advisory questions along with the yes/no voting.
- June Strunk, member of the board of finance stated that the board of finance has worked well together due to their diverse backgrounds and understanding of revenues and budgets, they have been able to solve all problems within the board. Ms. Strong spoke about the great financial standing of the town and credits this to the work of the board. Ms. Strong stated that the changes should not be adopted.
- Matthew Berger, chair of the Charter Revision Commission stated the commission was called by petition of the community to examine fair, democratic elections for the Board of Finance. Mr. Berger stated that other items mentioned at the first public hearing were not explored due to other revision commissions covering these items and being unsuccessful. Mr. Berger stated that he believes these changes are a good middle ground for what the petitioners have requested and what the board of finance is against. Mr. Berger noted that the changes took effect in the Board of Education and Mr. Murphy fellow Charter Revision member had stated this transition was effective and the board governs well since he was on the board during this transition. Mr. Berger stated the letter submitted with the charter was unanimously approved by the commission. Mr. Berger stated that he believes the voters have trusted the board and that he hopes the board will trust the voters to decide. Mr. Simmons questioned why the commission accelerated the process. Mr. Berger explained to get on the November ballot the report needed to be complete prior to the November 1 deadline. All issues were discussed and the commission were decided not to be revisited due to lack of support for these topics. Therefore the commission has presented the changes with the board of finance. Mr. Spellman questioned why the charter revision commission did not look at a five member board of selectman as well as a town manager. Mr. Crouse stated that the commission was called by the petition and that was their charge. Mr. Berger stated the five member board of selectman was previously rejected. Mr. Berger stated that issue of a town manager was explored however was not moved forward. Due to issues with the structure in other towns and the fact a board of selectmen is a more democratic process this was not moved forward. Mr. Spellman questioned whether the commission explored bifurcation of the budget. Mr. Berger replied that only twenty towns use this structure and separating the education budget separates the schools from the government. Mr. Spellman questioned

whether the commission looked at the RTM system. Mr. Berger stated it was not brought to the commission.

- Sandy Grimes, member of the board of finance spoke about serving on the board. Mr. Grimes commented that the board members care about the town and they have worked together to compromise on issues. Mr. Grimes does not believe the board is broken. Mr. Grimes spoke regarding the budget referendum last year and miscommunication between the town and the board. Mr. Grimes expressed concern with the commission not examining all parts of the charter. Mr. Grimes would like to see all parties be satisfied and fears someone coming on the board with a personal agenda.
- Stephen Bessette, Vice Chair of the Charter Revision Commission, stated that the commission did have motions for other issues however a second was never made therefore the other ten members were on the same page. Mr. Bessette spoke on the benefits of the changes the charter revision commission has submitted. Mr. Bessette reiterated that the board of finance was created by a special act from the state, not by the town and now is the time to give the power back to the people.
- Eric Hultgren, spoke in favor of putting the current charter revision to a vote in November due to the large amount petitioners that brought forward this commission.
- Anne-Marie Pasquin, spoke in favor of putting the revision to a vote and submitted statement from neighbors supporting this as well.
- Ayo Bryant, spoke in favor of the charter revision commission's recommendations. Ms. Bryant stated that she would like to see better support for schools.
- Patty Naslund, spoke in favor of the charter revision recommendations and urged the selectmen to put this to a vote.
- Rachele Limberakis, spoke in favor of putting the charter revision to a vote.
- Jennifer Herbst, spoke in favor of the charter revision recommendations. Ms. Herbst stated the board of finance does not listen to the community regarding education. Ms. Herbst read two additional letters of support from neighbors.
- Bruce Yarnall, read several letters in support of putting the revisions to a vote. Mr. Yarnall also supported bringing the revision to a vote and voiced issues with the board micromanaging and not being responsive to the public. Mr. Yarnall stated the board of finance members have left already tonight and chosen not to listen to the public.
- Lori Taylor, spoke in favor of putting the revision to a vote.
- Liz Hall, spoke on behalf of three others who support putting the charter revision to a vote. Ms. Hall stated that those who care about education would like to see these revisions on the ballot.
- Anna Sawin, spoke in favor of putting the revision to a vote.
- Lisa Hoagland, spoke in favor of putting the revision to a vote.

- Chantel Watrous, spoke in favor of putting the revision to a vote.
- Bill Lyman, spoke in support of the process of the charter revision so far. Mr. Lyman stated that we must keep in mind there will be a difference of opinions however and issue of this size should not be decided at a small level and should be put to the voters.
- Virginia McCormack, read emails from two residents unable to attend. Ms. McCormack does not want to see large changes in government but does not believe it is right that there is not contested voting for the board of finance. Ms. McCormack expressed faith in the future residents of the town. Ms. McCormack urged to have the revision put on the ballot.
- Gail Shea, commented on the cover letter submitted by the commission. Ms. Shea testified that after examining the board of finance issues the other commission members decided not to discuss further issues. Ms. Shea stated that in the transition two members would have their terms cut from six years to four years. Ms. Shea stated that she believes the commission rushed and did not address important issues and would not have interfered with the schedule. Ms. Shea stated that the table of contents begin recommended is change and she does not recommend adding it. Ms. Shea questioned how these changes will be proposed to the voter.
- Greg Teifert, commented on Ms. Shea's testimony and understands how poorly written documents can be difficult. Mr. Teifert spoke in support of voting rights and extended terms for Town Clerk and Tax Collector. Mr. Teifert stated compromise is necessary in government.
- James Turner, expressed concern that the board holds a significant amount of power and is not elected democratically. Mr. Turner supported putting the revision to a vote.
- Joseph Trelli, spoke in support of the school system and has expressed concern with other friends desiring to move away due to issues with funding for education. Mr. Trelli supports the revision going on the ballot.
- Sarah Lewandowski, urged the selectmen to let the public vote on the revision.
- Ashley Gillece, spoke in support of the revisions and clarified that the commission did not change their minds, after listening to the community they focused on what was to be corrected. Ms. Gillece also stated that the commission chose to make the newly elected officials immediately accountable by putting four year terms into effect immediately. They listened to the public and did as charged. Ms. Gillece urged the revision be put to a vote.
- Lauren Yaworsky, spoke in support of the revision being put to a vote. She also read an email from a friend in support as well.
- Kari Mayorga, spoke in support of the revision being put to a vote.
- Bob Statchen read a statement in support of the charter revisions from Tom Longo.

- Heather Pescatello, teacher spoke in support of the revisions and supported it being put to a vote.
- Tom Verde, stated that he is sure the members of the board of finance are good people and have worked hard however their concern with the changes do not have merit. Mr. Verde expressed that the public just wants to know that their votes count and their opinions are heard. Mr. Verde
- Michelle Kirk, new family to the area, was surprised to learn that there is no accountability for the election of the board and supported the revision on the ballot.
- Emily Heuchen, supported the charter revision and expressed issue with the board listening to the public. She supports the revisions being put on the ballot
- Pat Hambly, spoke in support of the charter revisions. Mr. Hambly stated that although the members of the board of finance see that no change is needed however clearly 1500 members of the public see differently. Mr. Tambly urged the board put the revisions forward untampered.
- Bernard Sabbartini, spoke in support of the revisions and would like to see it on the ballot.
- Harriette Statchen, read a letter from a fellow resident in support of the revision going to a vote.

Mr. Spellman stated that he is proud of the democratic process and would like to see the revision on the ballot. Mr. Spellman reminded the public that the board will do their due diligence to put the best option forward for the town.

Mr. Crouse stated that he believes in the democratic process and that is primary. Mr. Crouse stated he would support putting the revision on the ballot.

Mr. Simmons stated the board is well intended and does good work but is torn because it is something for the voters to decide. Mr. Simmons stated he would support putting the revision on the ballot.

**(5) Adjourn**

There being no further business to come before this Board, the meeting was adjourned at 10:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Courtney Assad*  
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