

Meeting Minutes, West Warwick Charter Review Commission
Wednesday, April 28, 2010 6:30PM
Place: Town Council Chambers, Town Hall
1170 Main Street West Warwick, RI

- A. Meeting called to order by Commission Chairman Henseler at 6:30PM**
- B. Pledge of Allegiance**
- C. Roll Call-**

Members present:

Sean Henseler	Giovanni Calise
Brian Tucker	Frank Parente, Sr.
Mark Bourget	Felix Appolonia
Joseph Gardosik	
Barbara Tabak	

Member Late:

Ronald Nunes

D. Secretary determines a quorum is present. Guest speakers Lindagay Palazzo (LP), James Williamson (JW), Elizabeth Brunero (EB) and Director of Administration Michael Petrarca (MP) present.

E. Chairman Henseler review of old business.

F. Public comment:

Roger Bertrand- Has concern that attendance for Town Financial Meeting is low but could be improved if meeting were held on Saturday and in the morning. Also would like to see a monetary value placed on voting cards of all citizens that attend.

Alice Losasso, 207 Andrews Ave.- Would also like to see Town Financial Meeting on Saturday.

G. Question from the Charter Commission and answer session with Members of West Warwick School Committee and Director of Administration Michael Petrarca:

Q: Would it be of benefit to the town to have a representative of the Town Council participate in School Committee contract negotiations?

A: JW- Has not heard that the proposition has been tried before but proposal has its benefits and detriments.

LP- A collaborative effort between the Council and School Committee would be beneficial.

Q. Should School Committee Members be required to attend mandatory training seminars?

LP- Currently School Committee Members do not receive any training. She agrees with Lincoln School Committee member Mary Ann Roll that training is necessary.

JW- Agrees with training but notes that preparing for matters such as Caruolo Action cannot be taught.

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Q: Has the School Committee considered administrative consolidation with other local cities/towns?

A: JW- The School Committee has reviewed but feels that it would create another level of costly superintendants.

Q. What is the current cost of highest administration officials and related administrative costs?

A: MP- The current costs total approximately \$1.5M for staff, payroll, benefits, computers regional technical information system, etc.

(Chairman Henseler recommends an exploratory committee to look into consolidation.)

Q: Would there be a benefit to the town to have School Committee separated into wards instead of the current system?

A: LP- Does not see a merit to ward system, proposal would be expensive to campaign and does not believe it serves any purpose.

JW: Recommends that if a change is necessary, each Committee Ward could be adopt a particular ward and work in conjunction with a representative from the Council.

Q: Should the School Committee be given the ability to raise its own budget revenue via taxation?

A: JW/LP- Idea is worth considering.

Q: Is there anything in the Town Charter that prevents the School Committee from doing its job in the most efficient manner?

A: JW- No. State law and the Charter mirror each other and no changes are needed.

Q: Section 16 2-9 States that when estimated school expenses exceed revenue, the School superintendant shall report to a town representative (Town Manager) with a corrective action plan. Are we currently adhering to this law?

A: MP- Excessive number of line items in the budget make it impractical to comply each time a budget item is exceeded.

Q: What percent of your budget is taken up by contracts, mandates, regulations, etc.?

A: MP- 87 to 88% of the total budget is dedicated to these items.

Q: What are your thoughts on School Committee Members being appointed by the Council instead of current elected position?

A: LP- Does not agree with this proposal, would be too partisan.

Q: Would it be beneficial to the School Committee if the Charter specified a maximum percent of the budget that could be devoted to salaries?

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A: LP- Does not believe this proposal to be beneficial.

Q: Would the School Committee an advantage for the School Committee if the Towns fiscal year ended after the state's?

A: LP/JW- Would be advantageous, there would be no speculating what the state would do with funding.

Q: Should the Charter limit labor contract length? Is the current 3year contract the best way to conduct labor contracts?

A: LP/JW: This proposal has pros and cons. Constant negotiations would take place.

H. Public Comment:

Vincent Bradley, 215 Legris Ave. Would like to see an attorney represent the School Committee in all contract negotiations. Proposes that sanctions be administered to Committee Members when budget is exceeded and that an accounting system be put in place that maintains continuous control over all expenditures.

Alan Palazzo, 5 Robin Lane- Agrees that the town financial meeting be pushed to a later date and that meeting be held on a Saturday. Favors that all over expenditures be reported to the town within (5) days of discovery. Recommends that town Manager be present during labor negotiations and have final approval. Does not believe that persons should be on multiple boards other than ad-hoc committees. Accountability made for any Council/Committee that overspends.

Councilman Angelo Padula- All Council and School Committee negotiations should be done by professionals only. Accountability should be in place for any body that overspends its budget.

Councilwoman Phyllis Gustafson- Recommends a Town Council representative sit on the School Committee. In absence of this, favors Council and School Committee Member to be assigned to a ward. OK for persons to sit on multiple boards/committees.

Comment from Commission Member Ronald Nunes that proposal could be made that adds two Council Members (with voting rights) to the School Committee.

Town Manager James Thomas- Stated that he has worked in towns where the President of the Town Council was also President of the School Committee. Does not recommend that School Committee be expanded to (7) Members. Sees that the conflicts between Title 16 and Charter allow minimum room to move and that the swing of budget control is too far in favor of the School Committee.

Synopsis of letter received by the Charter Commission from Joseph Florio, Jr. and Bridget Skuce:

For attendance sake, town should not hold Council and School Committee meetings on the same night. School Committee should consist of one Council person and SC must disclose a yearly budget including all revenues and funding. School Dept. must submit a conforming budget within (10) days if Town Financial Meeting determines final budget differences. If a budget is in deficit, no supplemental tax issued to residents without voter approval. Committee should issue layoff

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notices by March 31st and all monies received throughout the year should be disclosed along with having a yearly independent audit of all income/expenses. (A copy of this letter was given to each Commission Member)

I. Next meeting agenda: Invitations to Fire Chief Joseph Baris and to a Member of the Pension Board. Commission will also review the remainder of the Charter.

J. Motion to adjourn by Chairman Henseler. Motion second by Vice-Chair Calise. Motion carried by unanimous vote. Meeting adjourned at 9:25PM.