

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 14, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, Chair; George Estrada, Vice Chair;
Florisca Carter, Secretary; Rueben Felipe, Harry Weichsel;
Charles Valentino, Sr.; William Marshall (6:10 p.m.)

OTHERS: Atty. Steve Mednick, Atty. Ed Bailey, Councilman Angel dePara,
Mayor William Finch (5:45 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Simpson called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. and stated that a quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes: February 1 and February 7, 2012
Special Meetings

- ** MR. VALENTINO MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 1, 2012
SPECIAL MEETING AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Estrada submitted edited minutes from the February 7, 2012 Special Meeting with the following correction on page 2, paragraph 1:

Mr. Estrada said all elected officials should be required to obtain any and all certifications available pertaining to that office. It should be a goal to acquire ongoing skills and maintain a high level of proficiency.

Mr. Valentino suggested that a sentence be added to include wording regarding training to be prepared to execute the required level of responsibilities. A discussion ensued, and it was decided to keep the proposed revised wording as submitted by Mr. Estrada.

Mr. Estrada requested a correction to delete the sentence following paragraph 6, stating that if we recognize the arrival time of one visitor, we would need to recognize all. Mr. Weichsel replied that Mr. William is on the Commission, and Mr. Estrada withdrew his comment.

- ** MR. VALENTINO MOVED THE FEBRUARY 7, 2012 SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES AS AMENDED WITH CORRECTION AS NOTED.**
- ** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE CHARTER.

Mayor William Finch joined the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

Mayor Finch thanked all those in attendance for their stellar contributions especially in view of sacrificing family commitments on Valentine's Day. He stated that it was very important for the members to know how critical it is that this charter revision mission is accomplished and he again expressed his appreciation to all involved.

Mayor Finch stated that by agreeing to serve on this committee is an expression of belief that there is a new vision for the City of Bridgeport and this vision will only come with a more modern charter document to govern the City that clearly anticipates the future needs of the City. This charter document needs to be more user friendly with delineated responsibilities to function effectively at higher levels of accountability and responsibility to help achieve the new vision with a path for the future. Greater levels of accountability and responsibility along with better business practices are essential, and the City needs a better way to effectively manage the infrastructure. He added that while he does not propose to have all the answers there needs to be a better way, and in particular the area of education has to be restructured. He reviewed the current two bodies of elected officials that affect spending and taxation with conflicting areas government is clearly not good, allows for finger pointing, and most importantly children are forgotten in the process.

Mayor Finch suggested that there are many models to be considered, including the Chancellor model from New York, the New Haven with is a hybrid of a mayoral appointed Board of Education, and others across the country. He added that an effective model must optimize have the objective to address achievement of educational goals to optimize student performance. He suggested that the Commission study experiences of community leaders and education experts, and to keep in mind that City resources are available to assist with this task.

Mayor Finch's message was submitted for the record, and is summarized as follows:

- I want to thank each of you for giving your time to craft a new charter for the City of Bridgeport. I look forward to working with you to create a new, more modern document to help us govern the City.
- We need a new vision for our government which will only come from an overhaul of our current charter. I want the charter review/reform process to assure the citizens of Bridgeport that their city government will be more "user friendly" and will function with higher levels of efficiency, accountability and responsibility throughout City government
- We need a new vision for Bridgeport governance, and a modern efficient charter will help us realize that vision. A new charter will provide us with a path to the future a path that gives us greater accountability, more modern business and government practices; and, greater involvement by Bridgeport citizens in what will be a prosperous future.
- In regard specifically to education there are some things I do know:

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The current model allows for two bodies of elected officials. One has spending authority without any taxation authority (BOE) while the other (City side) is responsible for half of the spending, but all of the taxation. That does not allow for accountability or responsibility to those electing the officials; and adults can point fingers under the current system, and the children are often forgotten. I don't know what the right model will turn out to be. It could be the Chancellor model, if allowed by Connecticut law, like in NYC; A mayoral appointed Board of Education, or some sort of hybrid as we see in New Haven or Hartford. Whichever model you recommend must optimize student achievement reforms. Before making that decision, I hope that the commission will request to speak with others who have studied and experienced different solutions to these challenges. They should include Policy Makers, educational leaders, governmental leaders in other communities, And of course, our own community leaders. These experts can help all of us become more educated about the differences and benefits of each of the potential solutions:

1. **Reapportionment.** The current charter (Chapter 5, Section 2) requires the City Council to adopt a reapportionment plan prior to the adoption of the plan by the General Assembly. The Charter ties the districts to the census data; whereas state law permits cities and towns to commence redistricting following the adoption and execution of a State Plan. Under state law the City does not have to adopt a plan until "Not later than June first in the year after the first regular General Assembly election following a reapportionment of the General Assembly". This means that the City Council can take into account both the "population data for the municipality from the most recent decennial census of the United States" and the "geographical divisions" of the General Assembly districts adopted by the State. This reduces the guessing and permits a more deliberate and orderly process for the public.
2. **Appointment Authority.** There are multiple appointment methods with regard to Department heads and other city officials as well as Board and Commission appointments. Unless there are legal requirements imposed upon the City a common method should be adopted so that the public can see the line of authority and accountability that flows to and from the Mayor. Moreover, some positions serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and others for a set term. The Commission needs to determine why there is such a variation.
3. **Repetitive and Redundant Procedural Provisions.** There are, at least, four provisions that address vacancies in various elected offices strewn throughout the Charter. While there may be statutory requirements for some positions, such as Registrar of Voters, there is no need to disperse these provisions throughout the document. There should be a standard provision for addressing vacancies with any necessary exceptions set forth within the provision.
4. **Departments, Boards and Commission Are Set in Stone and Subject to Stasis.** A modern government needs the flexibility to meet vicissitudes of budget, policy, emergency and political change. While a charter needs to lay out the constitutional standard, the structure should not be so prescriptive that you can't change course or move in a more efficient direction. The current charter needs a clear path for the creation of departments, boards and commission. Moreover, there needs to be suppleness for the Mayor and the City Council to meet the needs of the people without violating the requirements of the Charter.

I am hopeful that the Charter Revision Commission will consider provisions that do not set departmental categories in stone but rather establish such categories are “advisory” and subject to alteration through a publicly vetted “reorganization plan” proposed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The reorganization plan would be subject to the limitation that all governmental functions set forth in the Charter would continue to be provided to the residents of the Bridgeport; unless such function was eliminated as the result of a repealed Federal or State mandate. Moreover, any reorganization plan shall include specific reference to the departmental function(s) set forth in this Charter that will be carried out in said reorganization and shall be accompanied by an opinion of the City Attorney verifying that the reorganized function complies with the Charter requirements.

5. The Charter should strive to increase accountability of the Mayor and City Council and move away from diluted authority which gives power to officials who have legal authority to spend with no accountability on the revenue raising side of the ledger.

Mayor Finch then fielded the following questions:

Mr. Valentino stated that while the Mayor does have broad shoulders, is he proposing that a mayor be in charge?

Mayor Finch replied that while he does not have that answer, he is looking for a charter that will last for the next fifty to one hundred years. He asked the Commission to look around the U.S. and to recognize the opportunity that is here in Connecticut to bring about education reform. He stated that the Governor has made education reform a priority for the state and also with the State Commissioner of Education; we are in a great position to potentially lead the nation with education reform. He explained that with the areas outline in the circle of failing schools, the largest dot on that map was Bridgeport as having one of the worst performing areas. Mayor Finch added that while the new Board of Education is much more civil, there needs to be a better system of giving them the tools to be able to accomplish their mission.

Mayor Finch added that the system is broken and governance is missing, and the Mayor needs to be held more accountable for test scores and to react to authority which not evident here but is a trend across the country. He stated that America is tired of being at the bottom of the world with meeting educational standards; and there is a great deal of focus on raising the U.S. standards to be competitive in the world-wide environment.

Mr. Valentino asked if the Chancellor model has the same terms as a mayor, and if he was in favor of the Chancellor model.

Mayor Finch replied that the Commission should emulate the New York experts such as Joel Klein, Mike Bloomberg, and Mayor Destephano as they are the envy of urban America, for their ideas on urban education.

He suggested that even a phone conversation with one of them would be illuminating, and gave examples of his conversations at the recent U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington. He added that it is an exciting time as we are a part of a new frontier.

Attorney Estrada asked about economic development and if the mayor had any ideas on how this can be affected through the charter revision to enhance the economic development in Bridgeport.

Mayor Finch replied that the should devote time to address this in ways that makes the document more prescriptive and less constrictive, as the current procedures take too long and we need to act on a business cycle rather than municipal constraints. He gave the examples of china and South Korea that revamped an entire transit center in about twenty months, where here it takes six months just to repair an escalator. He added that the plan needs to be more nimble with broad areas of accountability and responsibility but allow good level of flexibility to adapt so as not to hamper government's ability to compete. He gave the analogy that the current document is for pilgrims without flexibility to meet the challenges of accountability, and needs to be less prohibitive and more permissive.

Mr. Valentino asked about term limits for politicians if the mayor was in favor of a four term.

Mayor Finch replied that he agrees with terms at the federal level but not at the local level, and that two years may not be the most efficient term. He agrees that changes legislatively may expect a referendum to empower a new government to take on those challenges, and that may require the two thirds approval or have it subject to a mayoral veto.

Mayor Finch stated that these areas are all part of this reform, and they could consider none or all of these ideas. He added that one way is to have term time-outs where legislators take a term off to add distance to Washington versus the local governments; and again they should consider all of these ideas in the discussion.

Mayor Finch clarified that these are not yet recommendations but at this time we are still at this fact-finding level.

Mayor Finch thanked the Commission for holding these extra meetings and public hearings. He asked to note that with this year's expected large turn out for the Presidential election, it presents an opportunity to reach as many people as possible with the communication of information to the general public.

Mayor Finch left the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

Ms. Simpson stated that due to the limitations of a special meeting, no further items could be discussed. She added that any proposed agenda items could be communicated to the Chair via e-mail including further red-lined comments and details of the March hearing.

Atty. Mednick asked when the 30-day period of special meeting requirements expires, and Ms. Simpson explained that the next few meetings would be approximately three or four Special Meetings due to issues with posting notification. Mr. Valentino suggested that the next three meetings be devoted to discussion of red-line comments.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox
Telesco Secretarial Services