

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 3, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, Chair; George Estrada, Vice Chair; Charles Valentino, Ruben Felipe; Harry Weichsel, Florisca Carter, Secretary (5:50 p.m.); Rev. William Marshall (6:00 p.m.)

STAFF: Atty. Steve Mednick, Atty. Ed Maley; Atty. Mark Anastasi, City Counsel

OTHERS: Council Member Angel dePara; Council Member Susan Brannelly; Council Member Andre Baker; Atty. James O'Donnell, Bridgeport Library Board of Directors; Judge William Holden, Bridgeport Library Board of Directors; Thomas Errichetti, Bridgeport Library Board of Directors; Don Greenberg, Bridgeport Library Board of Directors; Kenya Osborne-Gant, Bridgeport Library Board of Directors

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Simpson called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Atty. Mednick said that there were three sets of minutes to be considered at the next meeting. He also distributed copies of a letter from one of the local mayors.

Commissioner Felipe commented that Commissioner Estrada had been invited to speak on the radio about the Charter Commission and said that the interview had gone well.

FACT FINDING MEETING REGARDING GOVERNANCE OF THE LIBRARY

Commissioner Simpson then reminded everyone that the focus of the meeting was on how the Library Board was set up and how it related to the City of Bridgeport.

Mr. O'Donnell, the head of the Board of Library Trustees came forward and introduced himself to the Commission. He then gave an overview of the history of public libraries in the State of Connecticut.

According to Mr. O'Donnell, the libraries in Connecticut are creatures of the State in terms of governance. The history of public libraries in CT is one of haphazard growth. There were groups scattered in various towns. Bridgeport had a loose association prior to 1850, but in 1850,

there was a more formalized organization. Section 11-20 and 11-21 were created and public libraries were formed. Critical mass was achieved in 1881 after it started in 1850.

Commissioner Carter joined the meeting at 5:50 p.m.

The Common Council of the City of Bridgeport decided to avail itself of the State library laws. Originally, it worked on a subscriber system of \$2.00 per year. Later that changed. There were two ways to create libraries, one through the municipality and the other through the State.

Mr. O'Donnell said that he had a copy of the ordinance along with minutes from 1881 when the Library was first formed and other historical documents regarding the governance of the library. that he would make available to the Commissioners. Originally, in 1881, it was determined that a quarter of a mill would be allocated to the library. This was quickly determined to be inadequate and doubled to a half mill. The Library in Bridgeport has always been viewed as a independent entity by the State of Connecticut.

Mr. O'Donnell then gave a brief history of the various Trustees Emeritus for the Bridgeport Library. He stressed that those who served on the library generally serve for a long time.

Rev. Marshall joined the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. O'Donnell then introduced some of the members of the Board of Trustees who were present.

One of the things that the Library strives to do is be Available, Open and Accountable (AOA). He said that the Library must be above political fray in order to have an institution that is open to everyone.

Mr. O'Donnell then directed every one's attention to the appropriate sections regarding the funding. He stressed that there is no separate library tax, just a set percentage for a funding allocation for Library services in the general tax assessment. Currently, all the funds remain within the City General Budget, but a separate funding account should be established for the funds.

One of the commitments that was made was to allocate funding for two buildings, one for the East Side and one at Newfield, which need to be replaced.

Mr. O'Donnell said that he was proud of the fact that the Board has representation from all the sectors of Bridgeport and a wide array of skill sets. He said that the Library website had received a recent award for excellence. Mr. O'Donnell encouraged everyone to visit the Library website and view the various resources available, including some of the programs offered for the youth. The Library is also providing the public with computer access.

Mr. Scott Hughes, the City Librarian, then gave a PowerPoint presentation based on the reports that the State requires each year. He said that he had been in Bridgeport for five years and when he arrived, the Library had no book budget. During 2008, the budget cuts removed all the administration. He said that there was a significant shift in budget and the focus is now on resources. There are over 248 public access computers with databases and resource center materials in the libraries. All five library locations now have WiFi access. There are now 70,429 active library card holders in Bridgeport. Mr. Hughes said that it was a first line of credit for many people. There were several graphs illustrating the number of active users per capita, library visits per capita, Return on Investment, the percentage of Bridgeport tax dollars spent on the library, along with other illustrations of the various operating costs.

Copies of the presentation will be available online at the Library website.

Rev. Marshall then thanked Mr. O'Donnell and Mr. Hughes for their presentation. He said that the major focus was on accountability. He asked for clarification on how the Trustees were chosen. Mr. O'Donnell said that only two members of the Board had not been able to attend, but that the Trustees have to be dedicated. The Trustees serve without compensation. He said that he felt the system works well because the Board has been able to attract people who were dedicated to the library. Those on the Library Board are apolitical when it comes to the Library.

In terms of the accountability, he said that they were the only group required to report to the State. The Board finds the individuals who are dedicated to the library and the Council was responsible for approving them. There have been times when appointments have languished because of the vetting process. Mr. O'Donnell then related that there had been a situation regarding the lag time in appointments that would result in loss of funding.

Rev. Marshall asked how the Commission could enhance the Library through the Charter. Mr. O'Donnell suggested that by eliminating Sections 4 & 5 would be helpful. He pointed out that the fiscal year ends June 30th and the report is due at the State on July 15th. Mr. O'Donnell said that it would be helpful if there was more time to prepare the budget. Mr. Errichetti came forward and said that a 60 day window would be helpful.

Mr. O'Donnell pointed out that while the funds are available for staff, it takes at least six different departments' approval to get one staff member on the payroll. The library staff is involved in three city wide unions. The Board is not part of the collection bargaining, which makes it difficult to schedule coverage.

Commissioner Weichsel then said he was a strong advocate of the library and its system. He asked whether the Library Trustees were able to access the funding as needed. Mr. O'Donnell said that there were problems with the staffing. There were also issues with getting the funding for capital improvement for roof repairs. Mr. Errichetti then reviewed how the debt service was allocated and how this impacted the East End and East Side projects.

Commissioner Weichsel asked if the Library had plans to move forward into the world of information in terms of an urban community. Mr. Errichetti said that while the Library envisions 24/7 service via the internet, but also recognized the fact that there were those who prefer an actual book in their hands versus a Kindle.

Commissioner Felipe said that he had been a latch key kid, was now the father of six and supports the library, particularly in urban areas. Commissioner Felipe asked if this was the only self-perpetuating Board. Mr. O'Donnell said that he believed Bridgeport was the only one in the State of Connecticut. He said that this has been done this way for 150 years, and also keeps the Board above the political fray. Commissioner Felipe pointed out that the presentation said that Library was the cornerstone of democracy. he then asked why the residents of Bridgeport had no say in the appointments to the Board. Mr. O'Donnell said that the residents do have a say through the approval of the Council.

Commissioner Simpson said that she had been looking at the website and found it to be great.

Commissioner Estrada asked for clarification on the Board of Public Purchases. Mr. O'Donnell said that anything that is paid for by the tax dollars, it goes through the Public Purchases.

Commissioner Estrada said that he needed to review the problem with Labor Relations and Civil Service, but assured Mr. O'Donnell he was not the only one struggling with this.

Commissioner Estrada said that 1 mill was about \$7 million and asked what would happen if during a re-evaluation the property values dropped. Mr. O'Donnell said that when there was a line item that designated a certain percentage, the City knows what it costs to run a library. He then said previously the budgeting was scattered through out the budget.

Commissioner Valentino thanked the Trustees for attending the meeting. He asked whether the Library had a building funding. Mr. O'Donnell said that the City actually owns the building, but the Library was expected to handle the repairs. Due to several problems such as the Bond Council not meeting for a long time.

Mr. O'Donnell said that the Library is the living room of the community.

Regarding the relationship between the Council and the Board, Mr. O'Donnell said that The Library Board was always insulated. Previously the Board of Estimate dealt with funding allocation. When Mayor Moran was in office, the Board of Estimate faded and the Library became the City Council's prevue. The Council has the power to tax, the Library does not. The Library only receives a set percentage of the taxes.

Commissioner Carter asked what the pros and cons of having an appointed or elected Board member were. Mr. O'Donnell said that the pro would be that the Council would be under the impression that they had control, but this was not so due to the State mandate. The con would be

that it could allow politics to enter into the issue.

Judge Holden was then asked about his role as a Board Member. He replied that it has been working and if something is not broken, it shouldn't be fixed. His children had attended Bridgeport Public Schools and his daughter was now attending Amherst College. He said that there had not been any scandals, any problems, and the integrity of the Board members has remained high. He said that there were signs for almost everything in the City but the library. Judge Holden asked what would changing the process for appointment gain for the City. The self-perpetuating aspect of the Board has worked well. He added that there would be a document submitted to the Commission about the pros and cons. Commissioner Felipe said that one of the issues was that the Commission was looking to standardize the Boards and Commissions. The Library Board is the exception to the rule. Discussion followed.

It was pointed out that the Board is not really self-perpetuating because it is vetted by Ethics and approved by Council; one focus, no competing goals and no economic gain.

The discussion then moved to the relation of Section 11.33 and the line item authority. Atty. Maley also had a number of questions regarding the history of the special acts and the details of those legislative acts. Atty. Maley pointed out that some of the wording of the section could be interpreted in a different light than what Mr. O'Donnell was suggesting. A lengthy discussion regarding the wording of that section then followed.

Commissioner Weichsel said that he would like to apologize if he gave the impression that he was not in favor of the library or of books. He said that Board members that served for more than 20 years deserve a silver star. Commissioner Weichsel said that when he sees the members of the Board, he assumes that they have to be of a similar mind. However, he suggested that there may be some advantage of bringing younger people on board to facilitate new ideas. He also had some questions about accessibility for those children who have no way to get to the Burroughs branch.

Mr. O'Donnell said that part of the answer was there was an effort being made to reach out. The needs of the children coming to the library have to have a hand attached to it. He pointed out that Mr. Hughes had brought more items to the table.

Atty. Anastasi said that he would like some clarification about attempt to work cooperatively with the City Counsel; Labor Relations; and Civil Service on hiring. Atty. Anastasi asked whether the Board felt that if a new Charter was approved, they would be governed by it. Mr. O'Donnell said that he would like to be able to verify the fact that the funds were available and the position was still on the chart, and then hire the person rather than deal with the multiple layers of red tapes. Mr. O'Donnell commented that Atty. Daniel Patrick Moyahan pointed out while everyone was entitled to their own opinions, they were not entitled to their own set of facts.

Commissioner Simpson thanked everyone for their presentation.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER FELIPE MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COMMISSIONER WEICHSEL SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services