

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
MARCH 8, 2012**

**ATTENDANCE:** Cathleen Simpson, Chair; George Estrada, Vice Chair; Florisca Carter, Secretary; Charles Valentino, Jr.; Ruben Felipe, Rev. William Marshall; Harry Weichsel

**OTHERS:** Atty. Steven Mednick; Atty. Ed Maley; Atty. Thomas Mulligan

**CALL TO ORDER.**

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

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES.**

**March 1, 2012.**

The following correction was noted:

Page 4, third paragraph, line 1, please change: "Commissioner Estrada said that there" to "Commissioner Valentino said that there"

**\*\* MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 6, 2012 AS CORRECTED.**

**\*\* MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**FACT FINDING MEETING REGARDING EDUCATION GOVERNANCE:**

**a. Presentation by Tom Mulligan, former member of the Bridgeport Board of Education.**

Atty. Mulligan said that he only had a brief experience on the BOE. Ms. Simpson said that she had invited other Board members to meet with the Commission but they had not responded. Mr. Felipe agreed. Atty. Mulligan said that he was on the Board from January 2011 until it was dissolved.

Atty. Mulligan said that the primary discussion centered on the deficit in the current budget, along with the upcoming budget for 2011-2012. It became clear that there were tremendous

tensions and conflict with the executive branch of the government, along with both departmental and legislatively issues internally. Atty. Mulligan then gave an example about the tension surrounding the amount of money needed in escrow for health care among other examples where there was a significant lack of communication between the administration and the BOE. He said that it was clear that there was mistrust between the City Council and the District. The people involved had good motives, but the system appears to work against the various parties. There is a great divide between those who appropriate the funding and those who depend on the appropriations.

Atty. Mulligan pointed out that many years ago, the system worked because the City had been prosperous and the educational needs were not so great. Later, as the City became less prosperous, there were still Federal funds available. When the recession happened, the tensions increased because the Federal funding started to dry up.

Atty. Mulligan said that he was in favor of a mayoral appointed Board because of the accountability and would bring a level of unity that was needed.

*Atty. Anastasi joined the meeting at 5:55 p.m.*

Atty. Mulligan said that the budget should be approved by the City Council and it should have minority representation and other checks and balances. He pointed out that while the voters have elected all Democratic Board members in the last few years, there have always been dissonant voices on the Board.

Atty. Mulligan said that he had an informal meeting with some involved parties who told him that there were individuals who were willing to give money to education, but would not because of the way the system was currently set up. He pointed out that the Federal funding was drying up and that while the State was providing funds now, he felt that the money was because the State currently had a vested interest in the District. Atty. Mulligan said that he did not see how the taxpayers would be able to afford more tax dollars. The tax base has been stagnant for the last few years.

The Parks Commission, the Fire Commission and the Police Commission have all run well, so Atty. Mulligan said that he couldn't understand why an mayoral appointed Board would not function as well. There were several Board members that have gone to serve on the State level, which indicates the level of commitment on the part of the Board members.

Atty. Mulligan said that this would give the Commission an idea of why he voted the way that he did in regards to the State. He said that he felt that it was a mistake for the Board members to try

to micro-manage the system. He said that while there was nothing wrong with FOI requests, there were eight filed, which hampered the work of the District.

Atty. Mulligan said that he was the one dissenting voice in terms of adopting a budget, since he felt that doing a budget provides discipline. There are so many people who are working so hard to pay their taxes, they should have a system that runs efficiently. While he acknowledged that there would be dissent, he pointed out that if someone was appointed as a director, unity was important.

Atty. Anastasi commented that Atty. Mulligan had a long standing record of service with the City of Bridgeport.

Mr. Valentino asked about the negotiations that occurred between the City and the Board of Education. Atty. Mulligan reviewed the salient facts and said it was clear that there was no communication about the agreements involved in proposed contracts. Mr. Felipe clarified the fact that there are certain unions that have members who work for the City and others who work for the Board. When that happens, the City is responsible for negotiations of the contracts.

Mr. Valentino asked about the cost of education for a student. Atty. Mulligan said that he did not have exact figures, but explained that a student without special needs would be assigned a set cost, but a special education student would cost the District much more in terms of providing an education.

Mr. Valentino asked who would be auditing the expenditures. Atty. Mulligan gave an overview and said that he was in favor of holding a Finance Committee meeting on a monthly basis so that the public would know where the money was allocated and how much has been spent. Mr. Valentino has more questions about the requested budget extension to October, which Atty. Mulligan gave a quick overview. He said that a decision had been made to turn to Hartford to request more funding, which is what started the entire conflagration.

Ms. Carter said that it was important to know what the funding was being used for. She pointed out that there were things that money could not buy, such as parental involvement, teacher training and dedication. She said that she did not think that money was the answer to the problem. Atty. Mulligan agreed. He added that it was extremely difficult for single parent homes to maintain involvement. There are other homes are chaotic, and this also has to be factored in.

Ms. Carter said that it was clear that the current Mayor was dedicated to education. She asked what type of guidelines could be put in place to insure that future mayors will be as committed to

education. Atty. Mulligan said that any mayor who did not have a good superintendent of schools, a good police chief or a good fire chief, would be harming himself because the residents would vote him out.

Atty. Mulligan said that while an appointee might know about education, they also have to understand the tax payer who is struggling to pay the tax bill. Business owners have a sense how to make things run.

Atty. Mednick said that when the Hartford Charter was created, requirements were included to help with the selection of Board members, so there would be balance on the Board.

Mr. Estrada said that he had worked with Atty. Mulligan when he was on the Council and it was a pleasure. Mr. Estrada asked if there would be anything in Atty. Mulligan's experience on the BOE Finance Committee that would help alleviate some of what has happened. Atty. Mulligan said that the Board must use the Department of Public Purchases. He said that there was duplicating work, but cautioned the Committee about including something like that in the Charter. He said that it would be beneficial for the City and the BOE to combine some departments like Human Resources. Discussion followed about setting up the budget.

Atty. Anastasi said that the BOE is required to submit its request like all the other departments, but that the District receives funding from the State. Atty. Maley said that the BOE had submitted a budget a year ago, and then that budget is not binding once it is passed. He said that Council adjusted the budget downward, and returned it to the BOE. This would normally be followed with the BOE creating a new budget with the allocated funding. Atty. Maley said that he believed this is where the BOE failed to adopt the adjusted or reconciled budget. Atty. Mulligan said that he believed this was the process and went on to say that the BOE knew in advance how much the City would be allocating. There were years when the budget deadline was ignored and at least one other time when a single lump sum was requested. However, the City has certain fixed costs and therefore the Mayor does not have the ability to change certain costs.

Ms. Simpson thanked Atty. Mulligan for his clear and informative presentation.

Mr. Weichsel said that having a broad spectrum on the Board would be important. He then asked about Atty. Mulligan's reference to the private donations. Atty. Mulligan said that he could not give specifics, but added that when the Mayor had sworn him in to the Board, the Mayor had referred to the same thing. Atty. Mulligan said that he had a feeling that there were people who were interested in education of young people. Ms. Simpson said that a similar comment had been made at the meeting on March 6th. Mr. Weichsel had several questions about

whether acknowledgement of private donations should be included in the Charter. Atty. Mulligan said he did not think so because the Charter should be kept as simple as possible. He noted that someone had said that there were people who would want to donate to some "narrow minded program". He felt this was not appropriate.

Ms. Simpson said that she understood if there was more unity on the Board, then the money would be forthcoming. Mr. Felipe said that Superintendent Vallas has touched on this during his testimony as to how to handle this.

Mr. Weichsel said that he was hearing the word "tension" over and over again. He asked if there was a way to have tighter controls in the Charter. Atty. Mulligan suggested that requiring the highest standards in accounting would be one way, along with transparency through monthly reports.

Rev. Marshall said that he appreciated Atty. Mulligan's testimony. He said that he was present as a product of the Bridgeport School System. Transparency would be critical. Rev. Marshall asked how the Charter could be made to have transparency and accountable. When his children were in the magnet schools, there was more accountability expected by the schools. Atty. Mulligan said that he had coached one student who was very polite because of the parental/guardian instruction. Rev. Marshall agreed and said that when his children were in the school, the parents were expected to be accountable. Atty. Mulligan said that as he became involved in the Board, the issue of parental involvement came up.

Rev. Marshall said that he would like to know why those who oppose mayoral control object. Both Atty. Mednick and Ms. Simpson said that there had many invitations and requests to those who oppose the idea of mayoral appointment. Atty. Mulligan said that he believed one argument that would be presented would be that politics should be out of it. Another argument would be that the Mayor would have too much control. Another concern would be that education was too important to be part of the political scene.

Mr. Felipe said that he appreciated Atty. Mulligan's dedication and service to the City. He then asked Atty. Mulligan if he had followed the progress since the previous Board dissolved. He also wanted to know if the previous Board would have been able to select someone for Superintendent like Mr. Vallas. Atty. Mulligan said that he did not believe that the previous Board would have selected someone like Mr. Vallas.

Mr. Felipe said that there had been many questions about the tension and animosity against the governance. He asked if a governance change would result more accountability. Atty. Mulligan

said that the more the functions are merged and united, the less ability to say that the Board is wasting money. He said that it should be one, unified budget.

Atty. Mednick said that there had been people had been invited to address the Commission who were involved in the day to day functioning of the District. He said that on March 27, there would be a

Mr. Felipe said that there were two statutory hearings and currently there are seven public hearings, with ample time to speak. Atty. Mednick agreed and said that the Commission has bent over backwards to accommodate different opinions so their viewpoints can be considered.

Mr. Valentino said that he had heard a lot of "us against them" in terms of the departments and this was also true of the Board and the administration. Atty. Mednick said that there would always be difficulty when there was one person in charge.

Mr. Valentino said that it was understood that the current Mayor was pro-education, but the next Mayor may not be. Atty. Mulligan said that a mayor would want to educate the children in the municipality and also have police protection. Because of the problems with finances, it has become more obvious when people say, the Board is spending too much. Mr. Valentino thanked Atty. Mulligan for his time.

#### **Sub Committee Report on Community Outreach Public Hearing.**

Mr. Estrada said that he and Mr. Valentino had been at the public input session on Wednesday afternoon at the library, but no one had come to speak. There was one observer present.

Mr. Felipe said that he had spoken to the local radio stations and they were willing to broadcast announcements about the public input session. One of the stations is a Spanish language station and the announcement will be done in Spanish. The opportunity for the meetings were supposed to be on the website, but were not. A brief discussion followed about outreach and keeping the speakers on topic followed.

#### **SCHEDULING.**

Atty. Mednick said that he would have some points to raise. He said that Tom Cunningham would be joining the other two panelists on the 13th. Atty. Mednick said that Mayor DeStefano would probably not be able to remain for the entire meeting.

Mr. Valentino said that there was concerns about the Library Board and this issue should be considered further. Discussion about having potential speakers about the Board followed . Atty. Anastasi said that it would be good to check with CCM about this topic.

Atty. Mednick, said that the City Clerk and Town Clerk merger had been mentioned and he thought the discussion should be scheduled for a night. Mr. Felipe immediately invited Ms. Hudson, the City Clerk, who was present to attend a meeting.

Atty. Mednick said that he would be providing information about how Boards and Commissions were appointed.

Mr. Felipe said that he would like to send a recommendation to the Finance Director about changing the date for the budget. Atty. Anastasi said that he thought the OPM and CAO for their recommendation. Mr. Felipe said that if the Commission gave them something to react to, it would get their attention since it is budget time.

The discussion then moved to the timeline and scheduling the reading of proposed draft of the Charter with the changes. Atty. Anastasi said that he would like to know if there were towns where the Mayor was not presiding at council meetings, but mandated to be present. Atty. Mednick said that he had some information that he would be sending to the Commissioners and to Atty. Anastasi. Atty. Mednick said that he was working on an annotated copy of the Charter with notes and comments.

Rev. Marshall said that when he wants to make sure that the Charter authority is not changed by the rewording.

### **ADJOURNMENT.**

**\*\* MR. WEICHSEL MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services

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Charter Revision Commission  
Regular Meeting  
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