

Robert J. Bart

TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS/MICROSOFT "TEAMS"

2021 OCT -8 AM 8:40

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

WORKSHOP

TOWN CLERK
EAST HARTFORD

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

PRESENT Deb Arrieta, Richard Bates, Don Bell, Shelby Brown, Marcia Leclerc,
in Chambers Tom Rup (via Teams), Angel Santiago, Travis Simpson and
Eric Thompson

ALSO Matthew Hart, West Hartford Town Manager
PRESENT Jim Svara, Professor, University of North Carolina
via Teams Jason Grant, Director, International City & County Management Assn
Dr. Mohamad Alkadry, Director, UCONN Department of Public Policy

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bell called the workshop to order at 6:00p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

August 10, 2021 Workshop

MOTION By Marcia Leclerc
seconded by Shelby Brown
to **approve** the August 10, 2021 Workshop minutes
Motion carried 9/0.

August 24, 2021 Workshop

MOTION By Marcia Leclerc
seconded by Shelby Brown
to **approve** the August 24, 2021 Workshop minutes.

MOTION By Rich Bates
seconded by Travis Simpson
to **correct** the minutes by adding Richard Bates' comments as follows:
"Commissioner Bates asked what are the specific problems that would
require a professional person to be placed within Town Hall."
Motion carried 9/0.

The Chair explained that the main reason for this workshop is to discuss the idea of hiring a professional person – Town Manager – to oversee all town government operations.

The following speakers addressed the Commission:

Matthew Hart, Town Manager, West Hartford, Adjunct Professor, University of Connecticut Department of Public Policy

Mr. Hart stressed the importance of a professional *appointed* administrator. This could be accomplished through the Council/Town Manager form of government or the Mayor/Council form of government, which is what the town has now. An appointed chief administrative officer can (1) help to reduce the impacts of partisan politics and focus on merit-based decision making it; (2) encourage the development and retention of professional other city employees; and (3) help to promote good ethics throughout the organization.

Chair Bell asked where does accountability lie in the various forms of government, and what are the best practices in your experience in balancing roles to ensure that performance is not too dependent on one person?

Mr. Hart answered that he is most familiar with the Council/Manager form of government and for that form of government to be effective there has to be respect between the different roles that the Council plays as well as the Town Manager. *Accountability lies with both entities*. To some extent, they are checks and balances on one another.

Chair Bell asked what are the most important questions for us to be asking Mayors and Professional Managers and what should we be listening for?

Mr. Hart thought that asking Town Managers and Mayors how their form of government works in their respective communities and also, what hybrid forms of government are available to consider.

Chair Bell asked what else should the Charter Revision Commission be thinking about as this process goes forward?

Mr. Hart replied that, while the form of government is important to consider, he urged the Commission to take this opportunity to attempt to correct whatever issues in the current Charter are not working for the town.

Marcia Leclerc, Mayor and Commissioner, asked Mr. Hart to tell the Commission the number of hours the Mayor of West Hartford and the Town Manager work to perform their duties under the Council/Manager form of government.

Mr. Hart stated that the Mayor in a Council/Manager form of government is also the Chair of the Council, with all the duties that are attached to that position. Mr. Hart describes the two positions as the Mayor/Chair being the head of the government and the Town Manager is the head of the municipality.

Travis Simpson asked how the continuity of government and long-term planning projects are impacted by a Council/Manager form of government?

Mr. Hart reported that one of the primary benefits of the Council/Manager form of government is that the Town Manager will provide continuity during periods of Council transition.

Jim Svava, Visiting Professor, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill & National Civic League Model City Charter Review Project

Professor Svava gave the Commission a brief summary of his work experience. Most of his experience is with the Council/Manager form of government as opposed to the Council/Mayor form. In the Council/Manager form, Mr. Svava has come to understand that Council/Manager Mayors are important as facilitative leaders – they connect the different parts of the organization – which improves coordination and thereby improves results. The Council/Manager form of government brings together political leadership and professional leadership in a cooperative way.

Chair Bell asked what are the most important factors for the Charter Revision Commission to consider and what factors constrain or enable the decision-making process we are entering?

Professor Svava answered that the Commission should think about the qualities they are trying to promote in the government and what structures are most likely to promote these characteristics.

Chair Bell asked where does accountability lie in the various forms of government, and what are the best practices you've seen in balancing roles to ensure that performance is not too dependent on one person?

Town Managers are directly accountable to the Council. The Council monitors performance based on what the residents of the community want to accomplish. Town Managers are evaluated at regular intervals. If the performance of a Town Manager is not up to the Council's standards, he/she can be removed at any time. Additionally, a Town Manager is also accountable to the International City Management Association for meeting ethical standards that have been set by that organization.

Chair Bell stated that the Commission's next guests will be mayoral and professional managers. He asked what are the most important questions for us to be asking these guests? What should we be listening for?

Professor Svava suggested that the Commission ask how Mayors handle the broad scope of responsibilities in the Mayor/Council form of government cities, e.g. the extensive interaction with the public, the interactions with the Council and having the ultimate responsibility for overseeing the performance of town government. In the Town Manager/Council form of government, the Town Manager is an essential policy advisor to the Council.

Chair Bell asked what else should the Commission be thinking about?

Mr. Svava noted that an important issue to consider is whether the turnout and participation in the local election is as large and robust as it should be. He believes that local government needs to look at ways to improve election turnout.

Jason Grant, Director of Advocacy, International City & County Management Association

Mr. Grant summarized his work history for the Commission. He served in local government for 16 years as an Economic Development Director and a Communications Director.

Chair Bell asked what are the most important factors for the Charter Revision Commission to consider and what factors constrain or enable the decision-making process we are entering?

Mr. Grant believes that the most successful Charter Revision is when the current structure's problems are identified, the solutions that would help the community are clearly articulated through those revisions, and the public, the elected body and everyone looks at it and agrees that these are the challenges that are preventing us from getting to the end state of where we want to be and these are the recommendations that are needed.

Chair Bell asked how have municipalities made a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) accountable to a council in addition to a Mayor? Given your case studies, how would you shape a CAO type role to ensure transparency and accountability?

Mr. Grant answered that the best way to make sure the Chief Administrative Officer is accountable to the Council, the Mayor and the public is through the Council/Manager form of government.

Chair Bell asked where does accountability lie in the various forms of government, and what are the best practices you've seen in balancing roles to ensure that performance is not too dependent on one person?

Mr. Grant believes that the Council/Manager form of government ensures that all elected officials have an equal voice when it comes to hiring the Manager and to make certain that that Manager accomplishes the goals and policies of the Council.

Chair Bell stated that the Commission's next guests will be mayoral and professional managers. He asked what are the most important questions for us to be asking these guests? What should we be listening for?

Mr. Grant stated that it is important to have a Manager who is experienced in solving conflict since government often breaks down when disagreements arise. When comparing the differences in the role of Mayor vs Manager, a Mayor will need to be able to engage the public, build networks, make sure they have people on board with their way of thinking. Managers need to have professional training, business management, understanding budgets and finances, understanding complexities of state government and how that impacts local government.

What else should we be thinking about?

Mr. Grant stated that the most important aspect of revising the Charter is working together to achieve effective, efficient and equitable government to enhance the quality of life for the businesses and the residents of our community.

Chair Bell asked how would a deadlock be handled in a Council/Manager form of government? Does a Manager become fundamentally weakened by a hostile or a deadlocked Council? How difficult will it be for a municipality to find a qualified Town Manager that is able to manage operations for a larger municipality?

Mr. Grant said that there really isn't a deadlock between the Manager and the Council. The Council in their majority is who the Manager serves. He also believes that it will not be difficult to find a qualified individual to fill the role of Town Manager.

Commissioner Bates asked for further input when earlier in the meeting, Mr. Grant stated that before the Commission decides what form of government the town should have, they should look at the reasons that led the Commission to feel the need to change it.

Commissioner Brown asked Mr. Grant for clarification on the term "Chief Administrative Officer" as compared to a "Town Manager" to ensure that the Commission uses those titles correctly.

Mr. Grant responded that the Chief Administrative Officer is generally the term utilized for the position as a professional administrator of government that serves in a Mayor/Council form of government under the Mayor. The City Manager is the term generally used for the professional manager doing the administration of government under the Manager/Council form of government.

Commissioner Brown also asked for further explanation on the accountability of the Town Manager to the public.

Mr. Grant answered that the Town Manager's job is to provide programs and services to the people regardless of their political persuasion. This makes the Manager accountable to the public.

Dr. Mohamad Alkadry, Director, University of Connecticut Department of Public Policy

Dr. Alkadry explained his background in town government and public policy. He also stated that he supports the Council/Town Manager form of government especially for a town the size of East Hartford (approximately 50,000).

Chair Bell asked what are the most important factors for the Charter Revision Commission to consider and what factors constrain or enable the decision-making process we are entering?

In your research, how have municipalities made a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) accountable to a council in addition to a mayor? Given your case studies, how would you shape a CAO type role to ensure transparency and accountability?

Where does accountability lie in the various forms of government, and what are the best practices you've seen in balancing roles to ensure that performance is not too dependent on one person?

The council manager form of government is the most common form of government. It promises to bring about several benefits:

1. The council and mayor will always be the key policy makers. They will have the luxury to hire a competent manager who can in turn hire competent directors and executives within the Town. Separating politics from management is important to allow merit-based decision making.
2. It is a specialized system where a manager can manage and implement policies while the mayor and council can make policy and hold the administrator accountable for decisions
3. Competent management ends up reducing costs and provides more efficient operations. The manager who would be rooted in professional skills will usually improve processes and have a better organized system and better utilized resources
4. Special interests have less influence in a manager council system of government. A manager is interested in a more balanced approach to decision making where everyone is equally heard

A Council manager form of government is also adaptable to the needs of your community.

Commissioner Bates asked for a copy of the Code of Ordinances and the Personnel Rules and Merit System for the Commission to use as a reference.

Commissioner Thompson commented on how informative tonight's workshop was and looks forward to the next workshop on September 28th.

ADJOURNMENT

The Commission **adjourned** at 8:10 p.m.