

**MINUTES  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

**PUBLIC HEARING  
DECEMBER 15, 2008**

**2:00 PM—SENIOR & DISABLED CENTER**

Chairman Bafundo convened the Public Hearing at 2:03 PM in the Auditorium of the Newington Senior and Disabled Center. She read the public notice as published into the record as follows:

**This is to give notice that the Charter Revision Commission for the Town of Newington will hold two Public Hearings on December 15, 2008, in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §7-191 (a), regarding its draft report to the Newington Town Council that has been completed, but not submitted.**

- 1) A Public Hearing is scheduled for 2:00 PM in the Auditorium of the Newington Senior & Disabled Center, 120 Cedar Street, Newington, CT.**
- 2) A Public Hearing is scheduled for 6:30 PM in the Helen Nelson Room at Town Hall, 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT.**

**Copies of the draft report are available in the Town Clerk's office, and online at [www.newingtonct.gov](http://www.newingtonct.gov).**

**Dated at Newington, CT this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of December, 2008.  
Nancy Bafundo, Chairman  
Charter Revision Commission**

Chairman Bafundo asked the Commissioners to introduce themselves:

Robert Briggaman  
Tony Boni  
Nancy Bafundo  
Peter Boorman  
Alan Nafis  
Tanya Lane, Town Clerk

Chairman Bafundo stated that the purpose of the hearing is to hear comments from the public regarding proposed changes that the Commission has made to the Charter. She further stated that this is an opportunity for the public to provide feedback and comments, and requested that the comments be kept to three minutes relative to the revisions being proposed to the Charter.

Chairman Bafundo stated that there was a sign-up sheet in the back of the room and anyone wishing to speak would have an opportunity to do so.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mitch Page, 46 Olive Street, asked for permission to submit an article to the Chair for the Commission's consideration. He stated that the article is from Connecticut Voices for Children; the article is called "The Governor's Proposed Property Tax Cap: The Wrong 'Cure' for Connecticut's Relatively High Property Taxes".

He stated that since being elected Mayor last fall, Mayor Wright has proclaimed that “Newington is open for business”. Mr. Page stated that Mr. Wright is clear about his philosophy—meaning that Mayor Wright is representing the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (aka CBIA). Mr. Page continued stating that Mr. Wright is using Newington as a “test market” for the CBIA to see if he can sell the 3% cap so that corporate lobbies in Hartford can then use Newington as a guinea pig as an example of how to fool town residents into thinking that the 3% tax cap is actually good for them.

Mr. Page mentioned that no one likes to pay property tax, but that he was happy to pay his fair share for services he receives. He continued his comments by saying that we have a decrease in State funding to cities and towns and that is why we are having a problem with municipal budgets—not because property taxes are too high.

Mr. Page urged Newington residents to vote against the charter revision as it is currently proposed—or remove the budget referendum. He stated that the current Town Council has demonstrated that we do not need a budget referendum—they just passed a less than 3% budget. He concluded that changing the Charter would be a terrible mistake.

Lyn Connery, 225 Robbins Avenue, stated she was against the budget referendum. The process can be divisionary in the Town and detrimental to the quality of life in Newington. She said that the average citizen is not prepared to know everything about a budget. They are unable to attend all the meetings to become knowledgeable. She indicated that Councilors can be changed every two years through the election process, and concluded by stating that it is very costly to conduct a referendum.

Ms. Connery expressed that she did not believe that a Councilor, Board of Education member or the Mayor should be a voting member on a board or commission saying it can create a dangerous conflict of interest.

Carol Anest, 30 Harding Avenue, approached the podium. She indicated that she is a lifelong resident of Newington who decided to raise her family in this Town. She stated that Newington is a place where young families can move into and the elderly can enjoy their golden years. The neighborhoods are safe and children can have a good education. She advised that by changing the Charter to include a budget referendum that services and town activities would be cut and the infrastructure would deteriorate.

She continued by saying that there are many circumstances that can make a 3% tax cap a challenge for the Town—contract arbitrations, a major tax payer leaves the area, healthcare costs for employees can increase. She encouraged the Commissioners to remember that Newington comes first and not special interest.

Bill Lindberg, 154 Cambria Avenue, stated that the primary reason for charter revision is change indicating that it is time to update the Town’s functions and procedures to meet today’s demands. He said some sections of the Charter have become antiquated, and for the most part, the Commissioners have addressed those issues quickly and efficiently.

He went on to say that the budget referendum had made the Commissioners argumentative, cantankerous and angry. He thought it was time for a change in the budget process because residents are enduring a larger portion of the tax burden. He indicated that the taxpayers should have a direct say in how tax dollars are spent because having the Town Council vote a budget up or down is not a direct say. He stated that it should be the decision of the people.

Mr. Lindberg went on to say that those who are against the process cite two major reasons: 1) a small percentage of residents will determine budget spending and, 2) the general public does not have enough information about the budget to make an informed decision.

While the Council is a body of nine elected officials, he did not feel that they should have the final vote on something as critical as the budget, stating that voting them out of office would be a hollow victory. He thought the mailers regarding a budget referendum should include details to educate the public on the budget issues.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive, expressed concern about how much input she would have in the budget process. She stated that she was told to attend Town Council meetings. She indicated that she had attended these meetings and waited a couple of hours to see if her question would be addressed at the end of the meeting. She stated that she was a longtime resident of Newington and she did not want her taxes raised. She stated that she votes to elect people who will get the Town's finances under control. She commented on residents participating in Town government. She stated that across the board she does not see much participation. She concluded her comments by indicating that she was opposed to the budget referendum and opposed to elected officials serving on boards and commissions because it is a conflict of interest.

Michael J. Fox, 1901 Main Street, approached the podium. Mr. Fox commented on the reason why Newington shifted from a Town Meeting form of government to a Town Council/Mayor format. He stated that during the Board of Selectmen's tenure, Town Meetings were held and only special interest groups that agreed with the Selectmen attended those meetings. He said that when the Charter was passed, Newington began practicing a true representative democracy. He continued with his comments by saying that the first Mayor, Bill Reynolds, had testified to the Commission regarding his thoughts. Mr. Fox stated that the citizens of Newington elected a Council of their peers and charged them with crafting a budget that will support the services to make our Town a great place to live.

Mr. Fox closed his comments by saying that the mandatory budget referendum defined in the draft charter is not the product of clear thinking and does not reflect the representative democracy on which our proud nation is based and under which we have flourished for over 200 years. The mandatory budget referendum was very poorly thought out and could result in disaster for our Town, and should be stricken from the Charter completely.

Bob Pingree, 186 Brentwood Road, stated that he and his wife fully support the charter revision. He indicated that he thought the majority of towns in Connecticut had some sort of budget referendum process and didn't feel that there is any reason why Newington shouldn't have one too. He indicated that if there is less than a 3% increase in the budget, there is no referendum—saying that this is an excellent compromise. He reminded everyone that if the budget increase is greater than 3% then it goes to referendum and the people have the opportunity to pass it or reject it.

Richard Cournoyer, 337 Churchill Drive, indicated he was in favor of the referendum stating that people should have the right to vote on how the Town spends their money.

Mary Lou Condon, 37 Apple Hill, was grateful for the opportunity to speak at an afternoon hearing. She stated that she is a 55 year resident of Newington serving on several boards and commissions, and she remains an active volunteer. She stated that she does not support the budget referendum because it is a regressive step. She indicated that the present Charter allows people to participate by electing public officials every two years. She said that residents select responsible members who are accountable to us—this is true representation. We worked hard to abolish the Town Meeting form of government. That format was unwieldy and formulated a generational divide and a forum for vocal special interest groups.

Iris Larsson, 41 Buckingham Street, stated that she sees nothing wrong with allowing Newington citizens to determine the budget if there is a problem. She said that surrounding towns had turned down a budget a few times, and she thought that Newington should follow through with this proposal and allow the people to decide.

Joe Tambutto, 27 Jeffrey Lane, stated that the cost of services is funded by tax dollars. He further stated that many residents are senior citizens on fixed incomes. He felt that many would not be able to stay in Town because the taxes are so high. He commented that many surrounding towns have a budget referendum that has resulted in decreased budgets submitted by Council. The referendum shows what the citizens want and gives them a chance to make their voices heard.

Bill Reynolds, 116 Sterling Drive, approached the podium. He stated he was not going to speak pro or con on the Charter amendments. He asked that someone on the Commission explain the changes to the Charter and why they were approved. He expressed the hope that it was not solely to comply with a campaign promise.

Jeff Wright, 108 Halloran Drive, approached the podium. He began by saying that Section 821 is a simple process that will change the way the budget process works for Newington if the people vote for it. Currently, once Town Council sets the budget and the mil rate--that is the tax increase. There is no provision to change this. The past Council had a 2.86% tax increase without cutting services, three uniformed police officers were added, and education was funded. People should have the right to vote on the budget and the tax increase.

The Mayor continued by saying that the Charter would provide that if the increase was 3% or less, there would not be a referendum. If it exceeded 3%, it would automatically trigger a referendum. If the politicians explained to the citizens why they needed an increase greater than 3%--then the people would support that. He explained that after an automatic referendum of two times, if the people chose not to support the increase, then the process is over. Then the tax increase would be capped at 3% and the Education Circuit Breaker would be put into effect. This mandates a slight funding edge of ½% to the education of the children. This process will provide a predictability of the future tax rate. It will give Newington a competitive edge so the Town can grow the tax base.

Chairman Bafundo inquired whether there were any more speakers wishing to approach the podium.

She stated that the Charter Revision Commission was appointed on 12/11/07 and held their first meeting on 12/19/07. The Public Hearings are an opportunity to hear from the public. The minutes and tapes are available.

IF there is no other public participation we will close the Public Hearing.

Chairman Bafundo closed the Public Hearing at 2:45 PM and thanked everyone for participating.

Respectfully submitted,

Tanya D. Lane  
Staff Liaison