

## **Minutes of the Charter Revision Commission November 12, 2008**

**Present:** Chairman Ernie Petkovich, Thomas J. Sheridan, Jr., Bobbie Kling, Eric Remington, John P. Murphy, Elaine O'Brien, and Douglas Viets. Absent: Rodney Dillman Mr. Petkovich called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Town Hall lower level conference room. (Elaine O'Brien entered the meeting at 7:30 p.m.)

### **Citizen's Comment:**

None. Present from the public: Warren Packard, Maryann Zak and Tom Frenaye

### **Minutes:**

Eric Remington made a motion, seconded by Bobbie Kling, to approve the minutes of October 8, 2008. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Bobbie Kling made a motion, seconded by Tom Sheridan to approve the minutes of special meeting of October 21, 2008. The motion was approved with all voting in favor and Doug Viets abstaining.

### **Review of Action Items:**

Mr. Petkovich said #36 contacted Attorney McAnaney and received his opinion on those items. There were no outstanding issues. On Item #37 Elaine O'Brien provided the Commission with a copy of the State Statute concerning the number of signatures required on a petition for a referendum on the Town Budget. State Statute requires 200 or more persons or 10% of the total qualified to vote, whichever is less.

### **New Business:**

Mr. Petkovich introduced Richard Barlow, the First Selectman of the Town of Canton. Population: 10,000. The Commission asked questions from Mr. Barlow for over an hour and discussed how the town of Canton's government is run. Mr. Barlow took office last November. The position is part time. Canton has recently hired Bob Skinner as its Chief Administrative Officer. The powers of the First Selectman are very limited. The powers of the entire Board of Selectmen are extremely limited also, with a great deal of power being with the Town Meeting The trouble lies with the lack of participation by residents at these Town Meetings. For example an issue which the Board of Selectmen cannot act upon can be decided by as few as 10 to 15 residents at a town meeting. They are looking at what type of authority should be given to the Board of Selectmen, beyond the powers they have now. This process is currently being reviewed by a group studying the Charter.

Canton does not have a Town Manager/Town Council type of government. The CAO needs to have his duties expanded in terms of fiscal activities. Currently the CAO is limited in the amount of money he can move around within the budget and spending.

Mr. Barlow explained that the CAO reports to the Board of Selectmen. The First Selectman is part time with typically Tuesdays and Thursday office hours. The Board of Selectmen still sets policy. Their terms are for two years and that seems to work well. The town does not have any Human Resource Director or Town Counsel. Eighteen department heads report to the CAO. The Board of Selectmen hires the Police and Fire Chiefs, Fiscal Officer, Town Clerk and CAO. Canton has had this type of government since 2000. They have been through three Chief Administrative Officers since then. However, he feels Canton's government is effective and he believes that a professional is needed in town government. Elections can be won on popularity rather than qualifications.

After further discussion, Mr. Barlow left the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

**Review of Updated draft for Town Administrator:**

Rod Dillman was not present, so this would be discussed at the next meeting of the CRC on November 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Tracking Log:**

Item #61: Should the number of voters required to petition for a referendum be reduced from 10% to 6%. Currently under the town's Charter, approximately 860 signatures are required on a petition to have a Referendum on the Annual Town Budget. The Commission members felt this amount of signatures were unrealistic. Sec. 7-7 of the C.G.S. covers petitions for referendum. The State Statute states 200 or more signatures or 10% of the total number of voters qualified, whichever is less. Therefore, in our case, this would mean 200 signatures would be required. The Town Charter, however, states that a Town Meeting must be held first, and afterwards, any issue can go to referendum either by petition or by the Board of Selectmen.

Doug Viets made a motion, seconded by Bobbie Kling to require 250 signatures on a petition for referendum. The motion was approved with all voting in favor and Elaine O'Brien voting opposed. This item was moved to the Recommended List.

Item #60: Should the annual town budget meeting be replaced with a budget referendum.

Doug Viets made a motion, seconded by Eric Remington to move item #60 to the Not Recommended List. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

**Discussion with Robert Skinner:**

Mr. Skinner is the Chief Administrator Officer for Canton. He explained when he worked as CAO for the town of Columbia, he had no authority to hire/fire. That remained with the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Skinner felt the CAO should have that authority. Human Resource functions in Canton are handled by the CAO. Contract negotiations are handled by Shipman & Goodman in Hartford. They do not have a Town Counsel on retainer. Mr. Skinner felt that CAO need authority, but not to under estimate the

importance of the role of a Chief Elected Official. Mr. Skinner was in favor of the 2-year term for First Selectman.

The Commission asked him a variety of questions for about 45 minutes in total.

**Adjournment:**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Mr. Viets made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mrs. Kling. The motion was approved by unanimous vote. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine Koren, Recording Secretary

**NEXT MEETING: November 19, 2008 SECOND FLOOR  
CONFERENCE ROOM, TOWN HALL.**