

**TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT  
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF MEETING**

**March 1, 2022**

**\*To view the recording, please click the following link and observe the instructions when/if prompted:**

[https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/play/1voKIQIsSwJ-y3rAGo5cxXIP9p5QxY17BkS4mmbE-DDE7GyN9qBYzcNvgmNbloK67ATNgMh1j3fo.U\\_tJpJ1MRIS0HuSN?continue-Mode=true&\\_xzm\\_rtaid=Za8qYcdnR2qpght1jPrVJA.1646255498541.45f97c9bc5196c1aa8ff7a2114d77190&\\_xzm\\_rhtaid=30](https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/play/1voKIQIsSwJ-y3rAGo5cxXIP9p5QxY17BkS4mmbE-DDE7GyN9qBYzcNvgmNbloK67ATNgMh1j3fo.U_tJpJ1MRIS0HuSN?continue-Mode=true&_xzm_rtaid=Za8qYcdnR2qpght1jPrVJA.1646255498541.45f97c9bc5196c1aa8ff7a2114d77190&_xzm_rhtaid=30)

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A meeting of the Charter Revision Commission was held on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 via Zoom due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

**1. Call to Order: 7:07 PM**

**2. Roll Call**

Present: Sarah Gallagher, Chair; Frank Dixon, Vice-Chair; Jackie Downing; Jay Kaye; Y’Isiah Lopes; Laura Santino; Patricia C. Vener – Saavedra, Secretary.

**Also in attendance:** Steve Mednick, Counsel to Commission; Sue Gruen, Town Attorney; Kim Renta, Council Clerk; Michael Carter, former Chief Administrative Officer, New Haven’ Current Interim Director of Public Works, Washington D.C.; David Panagore, former Chief Operating officer, Hartford, CT, former City Manager Provincetown, Massachusetts and current Chief Administrative Officer, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

3. Approval of minutes (Feb 19 2022) Motion Downing, 2nd Gallagher. Santino proposes adding of language after discussion of party requirements in Legislative Council succession with "After discussion no change was made" to the original document. Accepted. Motion Passes unanimously.

**4. Public Testimony:**

No live public comments

One letter submitted: <https://www.hamden.com/DocumentCenter/View/5465/03-01-2022>

Public Comments for CRC can be sent to: [CRC2022@hamden.com](mailto:CRC2022@hamden.com)

## 5. **Agenda**

### ***I. Panel on Chief Operating Officer/Chief of Staff***

- Michael Carter, former Chief Administrative Officer, New Haven's Current Interim Director of Public Works, Washington D.C.
- David Panagore, former Chief Operating Officer, Hartford, CT, former City Manager Provincetown, Massachusetts and current Chief Administrative Officer, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Carter: Thinks it's a good idea to have a Chief Operating Officer (COO) or Chief Administration Officer (CAO) to manage day to day dealings of the town, leaving Mayor to do mayoral work. Having a good staff helps. A COO can move Hamden forward. Can get things done working directly with police, fire, public works, parks and rec, library, chief engineer, and so forth.

Panagore: Says that our first attempts are a good start, but as written it's more of an assistant to mayor i.e., Chief of Staff. Suggests we include qualifications and minimum standards. Too many mayors care more about loyalty more than qualifications. Commission must ask, "What do we want the person to do? What kinds of authority will they have?" Should not maintain "bully pulpit" for mayor. Should be a professional not just a politician. Still they have to get along with mayor.

Gallagher – Asked Panagore if his term was overlapping with the mayor. Panagore - the position already existed in the city charter. He sat down with the Mayor and they worked out a shared vision which gave him the authority to get things done. If the Mayor doesn't like the manager/COO they just won't invite COO to meetings which then leaves the COO toothless.

Lopes -

1) What would be the current salary range for COO/CAO Both panelists agree - Depends on qualifications and cost of living. \$165,000 to \$200,000 though ICMA would have ranges.

2) In both your roles were you appointed by mayor?

- Carter was interviewed by a panel of citizens and then made a recommendation to the mayor who agreed and then it went to alder (New Haven). Panagore already had a job in the city government when the mayor just offered him the role. Then it went to city council and he interviewed with council.

3) Are COO and chief of staff the same? Panagore - Not really, COS is more political and is a conduit between mayor and populace. COS spend more time in collective bargaining.

Gallagher follow-up - do you think police and fire department heads should report to the mayor or to the COO?

- Carter they should report to COO but COO would meet with mayor and COS, and both of those go over issues brought up by citizens. COO interacts with citizenry.
- Panagore - Human Resources (HR) and Tech stuff needs a panel. When there's a fire the COO doesn't go to the fire, the mayor (or someone from his office) does. The COO makes the machine run.

Kaye -

- 1) Qualifications listed in our draft - were they enough or are we missing stuff?
  - Carter: MS in Business Administration (or related) should be there.
  - Panagore: the degree sets a threshold. Our use of "may include" implies qualifications are optional.
- 2) What about residency? Do you find that to be an issue in your experience?
  - Panagore - He does but he doesn't think it should be required. In Cambridge MA, residency is required for upper level salaries because the cost of living is too high for lower paid employees. It impacts ability to do the job if people don't see you around.
  - Carter - DC has trouble attracting qualified people because it's so expensive.
- 3) Asks about the issue of coterminous rather than at the pleasure of the mayor.
  - Panagore does not think it's relevant. If the mayor hates you they can ignore you, (freeze you out).
- 4) Kaye - You both worked for towns with COO. Could there be growing pains with dept. heads?
  - Carter - If they are not used to weekly meetings it can be an adjustment for them.
  - Panagore - Weekly meetings make a good impact. But mayor and COO need to have a good relationship to be effective. The person who hires and fires you is your real boss. If you are COO you can start delivering, the department heads will adapt more easily.

Dixon - Mayor is elected and COO is selected based on skill sets. Please reiterate the "direct line."

- Panagore: in Hartford, the COO had hire and fire authority except for Police and Fire.
- Carter - pretty much the same. Fire liked reporting to him because he was able to form administrative bodies that were helpful. Police not so much but he did work with respective their commissions effectively.

Gallagher - what do mean by "hire" and "fire?" Do you mean department heads were not appointed by the mayor and approved by the LC?

- Panagore - Many positions had to be approved by council but not fired. The COO had the authority to deal with problems, get panels and tests and so forth.
- Carter had similar experience. Library board of dir. did the work and he sat on panel.

Lopes - re: "caught in between" why can't COS do the administration work? Can't that be the Mayor's choice/responsibility? Should role of COS be the same as COO?

- Panagore - An apolitical management, with tighter qualifications (we need to determine these responsibilities) is a stronger, more authoritative, position. If it's at all weak, it is a high level executive assistant. The Chief of Staff is the political in-house staff for Mayor.

Gallagher - Charter vs Ordinance - Can a town strengthen charter language without going into ordinance language or do you need both?

- Panagore - charter has less tendency to be amended in short term whereas Ordinance can be amended any time Section 5-6: B (1) (a) (Qualifications- Change "may include" to "shall include" degree. Below where it talks about duties - COO should have HR and finance for example under them or they have no ability to function properly. COO prepares (5-6 C. (4). budget mayor proposes it.

Mednick - The Hartford charter specified "managerial aide" COO to be appointed to serve at the pleasure of the Mayor but should have qualifications. Was it a problem?

- Panagore - When a mayor no longer has confidence in the COO, the mayor can run around them so it does not matter so much.

Dixon - Regarding your experiences with political process, did you experience situations where department heads were political appointees only without regard to qualifications?

- Panagore - In Hartford he was told he could shape the department as needed but it turned out to be more difficult once people are there. Recommends that HR be one of the departments that report to the COO.
- Carter - had authority over HR but labor relations was all political appointees. He refused to do anything unethical.

Lopes - Do you think it's important to have organizational chart that outlines chart that shows whose responsibility is what?

- Carter - Yes, including hierarchy, responsibilities, functions, etc.
- Panagore - Yes, one should be published to be kept to date for both for internal and external use.

## II. *Testimony from Department Heads*

Gruen - Curious about how the panelists make things work given constraints of management reporting requirements. Gives a quick report of her concerns:

1. Specifications in charter: The job description should be specific but job requirements should not be laid out in the charter because things change faster than charters.
2. Both panelists were describing governments that are larger than Hamden's.
3. We are diminishing the department heads' authority by having a COO. Hamden has a small staff. Are we going to have the budget for this?

4. Specifications leave little discretion to mayor to make own choices.
5. Under MIRA the department heads must report to Chief Exec. She wished she had asked how, in Hartford and New Haven, they are allowed to report to COO.
6. Knows that some department heads are ready to sign union cards if we go ahead with this.
7. Their experience is not Hamden's. In Hamden, the mayor works with finance department not a COO and it should be the Mayor.
8. Does COO assist the Mayor in all BOE negotiations (see MIRA comment above)?

Gallagher:

1. Is there a MIRA expert we can talk to?
  - Gruen - Steve and she and labor council spent hours arguing on phone. We could invite our labor council
2. Are you recommending we eliminate the position or modify it?
  - Gruen - Not sure. We are diminishing powers of Mayor.

Downing:

1. What we are setting out to do with COO is a fine line between town manager and Mayor so we have guarantee a professional gov't. It is not an elected position but rather based on qualifications.
  - Gruen is uncertain. Worries about the good of the town in general.
2. Reminds us that we switched to 4 year mayor term and one of the reasons was to attract better quality mayoral candidate and better department heads.

Vener-Saavedra: Is it our (town's) size?

Gruen: No. it's the size of our staff of government.

### III. *Discussion and Action Items*

#### **Chapter IV – Legislative Council (no changes)**

Gruen points out that the Charter says that LC must meet on the first Monday after swearing in, but traditionally they actually wait to meet on the regular Monday that they always meet on. This really should not be so restrictive.

Mednick asks "what if they need to replace someone?" This last LC this was the first time they ever complied with the Charter rules.

Kaye: Swearing in is a few weeks after the election so they will just have to know that Sunday they get sworn in and Monday they meet.

No Changes were made to this section.

Vener-Saavedra asks a question about section 4-12 regarding "inter-local agreements and BOE. Specifics are more fully covered in future sections, but yes, BOE is included.

## **Chapter V – The Mayor (Contracting Reports; Emergency Power Accountability; and, Chief Operating Officer versus Chief of Staff)**

Changes to include date for the quarters is fine.

5-4: Changes better define how emergency fund transfers up to \$100,000 and provide for mayor's report after funds are spent.

Lopes - what would be considered an emergency?

- Mednick - state statute emergencies - these are public emergencies needing town services as defined by state statutes.

### Section on COO/COS

Lopes - has reservations on moving forward because of budget concerns. May put financial burden on the Townspeople. If we decide to have a COO then Mayor should choose.

Dixon - reiterates comments on qualified people in place in all/more places in town government. What will drive the budget is having lack of processes and positions that are professionally based. Can't keep making decisions based on fear. We will grow if we become more professional. Mayors are elected and Chief of Staff are selected. But the "selected" person may not really be qualified as much as a friend of the Mayor.

Vener-Saavedra - further insists that having a trained, qualified professional in town management leads to more professionalism and a better run town government.

Downing - Curious how mayor's office is presently structured. It's at the mayor's discretion. Do we know how it's presently structured? We've had lots of position names but apparently did the same jobs. She agrees with Vener-Saavedra on qualifications and professionalism. We won't dictate all the positions in the Mayor's office but this one we want. While making sure department heads have some autonomy.

Lopes - adds on to Jackie's comment. He gets it, we don't want to hurt morale, which is why he advocates creating an organizational chart. It gives accountability and structure. Whatever is outlined in charter it will be up to mayor to decide who to hire. No mayor will appoint someone adverse to mayor's vision.

Vener-Saavedra - Mayor can hire someone she/he can work with but will be constrained by requirements of professionalism and qualifications.

Gallagher – Do we have information on the number of staff in Hamden's town government?

Mayor's office includes: mayor chief of staff, deputy, chief of staff, executive secretary, and a couple other positions.

There are 416 budgeted full time positions in Hamden's budget. Mednick does not know how this stacks up with other communities.

Gallagher - keeps hearing professionalism from comments from public.

Dixon - did we talk about co-terminus or not? Should we address it yet?

Also reminds the group that COO is effectively terminated if and when the mayor cuts them out.

Downing - should be co-terminus. A new mayor should be able to choose who they work for.

Gallagher - Asks for input from Kaye and Santino.

Santino - On the fence. While we need more professionalism, where does leave chief of staff and deputy chief of staff and the other two people in the office. If we add this we should remove something else? Chief of staff is not in the charter.

Gruen - One of those is a Union position (the receptionist).

Santino - Is there a list of who is union and who is not? (Because that effects what changes can be made.)

Mednick will find panelists or resources to discuss.

Kaye - is torn. When the panelists were speaking he was all for it, but after hearing Sue and reading chief's letter his enthusiasm dropped. Yet, the town may have a great mayor and chief of staff but they still might not be professional. We should leave it to mayor to decide the powers of the COO. No employee wants to work for someone not professional and knowledgeable. He is committed to making the people's desire for professionalism work.

Dixon - "echoes" Kaye's comments. We don't need to add a layer. We need to evaluate what we have now and see how we can turn those other positions into positions that are professional.

Downing - let's turn things around, I think of it as a position that will act as a thought partner who can help keep things running. They are a help for department heads. "I can help you do your job better" not "I can do your job better."

Gallagher suggests we pause the conversation to do some due diligence and maybe hear from others and then come back to it. Suggests we put on next meeting's agenda or later. We all agree.

## **Chapter VI (no changes)**

### **III. Final Action of Preamble and Chapters I – III**

Town Clerk: elected or appointed; 2 yr. or 4 year term

Patricia Vener-Saavedra support elected and 4 year term.

Gallagher agrees. Dixon - supports as well.

Downing moves to make Town Clerk a 4 year term coterminous with Mayor, Lopes seconds.  
Passes Unanimously.

### Succession

Mednick brings up the Issue of Succession - If mayor is gone LC president becomes mayor and either stands for election in the next biennial or tries to get his LC seat back. This leaves only president pro temp position. Person running for LC Pres has to know they could be Mayor.

Kaye - if LC president. is unable or refuses is there a provision for LC to choose someone else? Is that even necessary?

Mednick - we could throw something in there but that makes for more activity. It's really not necessary, and we don't want to encourage people to not take this seriously.

Lopes - on the fence - feels that special election people choose who they want. People may not agree with council and now they have someone as mayor they don't want.

Mednick - the substitute mayor would only serve at most two years.

Lopes - Still uncertain despite the two year max. The person now in position may not be effective.

Downing - Is concerned that needing to replace the mayor early on will happen. We have to be comfortable with what we do. But also, how would the town would mobilize for a special election? How will we get a qualified person in special election? We would have to find someone and have them run.

Santino - Recommends we hold off because we are being very quiet.

Dixon - Reminds us voting today doesn't mean everything will be voted on at end of process.

It is agreed we will hold off on decision for now.

Santino RE: reapportionment: It was originally thought the change request came from registrars but Santino check and confirmed that it did not. Registrars feel this addition is not needed as they follow state statutes.

Gallagher makes a motion to Strike D.e.2 in reapportionment and accept all other issues except the two outstanding issues (COO and succession). 2nd Santino.

Passes unanimously.

Time adjourned: 10:16 PM

Next meeting: Saturday, March 19th at 10:00 A.M.

Meeting schedule can be viewed here:

<https://www.hamden.com/DocumentCenter/View/5428/Hamden-Charter-Commission-Schedule-and-Subject-Matter>

Minutes submitted by Commission Secretary Patricia Vener-Saavedra