



Vote NO in NOvember If You Care About HOW Things Are Done in Fairfield

The Town Charter codifies the basic rules by which we agree to govern our Town. These rules should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they allow us to govern ourselves as well as possible.

Because nothing is more important than how we govern ourselves, any review should be conducted by knowledgeable and impartial citizens who are able to analyze all of the costs, benefits, tradeoffs and risks associated with any possible governance changes, and to explain clearly the basis for any changes they recommend.

Unfortunately, the recent Charter review process was flawed in many ways:

- Months before any formal announcement that the Town would be reviewing its Charter, outside counsel was retained for that purpose and briefed by the First Selectperson (FS) and Town Attorney without consulting other members of the Board of Selectmen (BOS), which is the Town body responsible for the Charter review process.
- Then, the First Selectperson nominated a full slate of seven members for the Charter Revision Commission (CRC), a majority of whom appear to have been chosen because they were in favor of major changes in the structure of our government (e.g., replacing the three-person BOS with a Mayor, replacing the RTM with a Town Council, and hiring a Town Manager to run our Town), all seven of whom were subsequently approved by the BOS, not unanimously, but on a party-line vote (two R's in favor, one D opposed).
- And, without informing the BOS that a much longer timeframe was possible, the schedule for Charter revision was drastically shortened to about one year from the almost three years allowed by State statute, a critical decision with important negative consequences:
 - critical issues were deliberated by the CRC during the summer months when many citizens were away and unable to participate;
 - the Representative Town Meeting (RTM) was denied its important role under State statute of forming an independent, bi-partisan committee to advise voters on any proposed Charter revisions; and
 - the CRC was not able to do its job, stating in its final report that it did not have "*sufficient time to carefully study whether there are disadvantages in the current structure, decide on what changes would improve the town, and then gain the support for the changes from the Town political leadership and citizens.*"

- The CRC did not merely run out of time, it was never able or willing to analyze fully and explain clearly the full implications of potential governance changes that either were or should have been considered within the context of Fairfield’s unique history and civic culture.
 - Instead of thoughtful analysis, the CRC merely deferred to “expert opinion” about how other towns are governed and asserted that Fairfield would somehow be “more efficient,” “more streamlined” and “more accountable” if, like them, it concentrated power in fewer hands with fewer checks and balances.
 - Instead of thoughtful analysis, the CRC spent its time trying to reach agreement among its members, flipflopping on some of its major decisions for reasons that were never explained in public, making some recommendations that we are being asked to approve without any rationale whatsoever (e.g., reducing the maximum size of the RTM and stripping its authority to manage its own size), and never debating critical issues like whether the proposed new, expanded Chief Administrative Officer position should report only to the First Selectperson or to the BOS.
- When the CRC was eventually forced by a huge public outcry to abandon any major structural changes, its remaining recommendations were hurriedly lumped together in one “omnibus” ballot question that denied the public our right to vote separately on certain significant changes, and which failed to explain clearly several significant changes.
- Last but not least, all these process failures have imposed on Fairfield a substantial “opportunity cost” by denying us the potential benefits of what could and should have been a far more open, impartial, thoughtful, rigorous and unhurried review of possible changes in our Charter.

If you agree that we should all care deeply about HOW things are done in our Town, and that Fairfield deserves a second chance to do the job right by appointing a new CRC, please “Vote NO in NOvember” on ballot question #2.

Bud Morten

October 18, 2022