

## **CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES**

After an extensive and detailed review process that involved 36 separate meetings of the Commission, the Commission has made a series of substantive recommendations for changes to the Charter and has prepared a draft revised Charter that it unanimously recommends for adoption by the Town.

### **A. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES**

The Commission is recommending a considerable number of changes to the existing Charter. Some make meaningful changes to the way we govern ourselves. Others are less significant, such as those that are intended to clarify the document or make it more readable. In this section, we summarize a few of the most significant changes. However, the changes are too numerous to include in a short summary, and we therefore recommend that the public read the proposed Charter in its entirety in order to understand the full range of changes that are being proposed.

#### **1. Changes to the Annual Budget Process**

The process required by our current Charter for approval of the Town's annual budget is in some respects cumbersome and in other respects unclear. The Commission is proposing a new process that it believes is clearer, simpler and more effective. The key changes are: (1) a requirement that every proposed budget be approved by both a Town Meeting and a referendum taken by machine ballot in order to ensure the broadest possible participation in the budget process; (2) review by the Board of Finance of any budget submitted to a referendum, including any budget rejected by the voters, to allow for changes to the budget in response to the views of the public; and (3) requiring that a quorum be present at the Town meeting in order for changes to be made to the budget, along with a new procedure to allow secret ballots at the Annual Town Budget Meeting, which are intended to promote broader participation at the Meeting and a balanced process for the Town budget.

#### **2. Elections**

Certain changes are being proposed that affect our municipal elections. First, we recommend that the position of Tax Collector, which is currently an elected position, become an appointed position beginning at the end of the Tax Collector's current term. The reasoning for this recommendation is detailed in our Report at Section II F(1)(j). In short, we believe that, as a professional Town employee, like the Town Administrator, this position should be appointed by the Board of Selectmen and should report to the First Selectman. The Town Clerk would remain an elected position. (However, we recommend that, upon the filing of a petition signed by 5% of the qualified voters, the question of whether the position of Town Clerk or Tax Collector, as the case may be, should become an appointed position or elected position, respectively, be presented to the voters.)

Second, we recommend that the terms of the members of the Board of Finance should be reduced from six years to four years beginning in 2017. The reasoning for this recommendation is found in our Report at Section IIF(1)(l). The current six-year term is longer than any other Weston public official and longer than the terms of Boards of Finance in nearly all Fairfield County towns with charters. We recommend the adoption of terms

more consistent with prevailing standards. These changes will also help us fix the election cycle for members of the Board of Finance, which is currently out of balance. Finally, we have addressed a long-standing flaw in the manner in which we elect members of the Board of Education. Currently, members holding a majority (four seats) on that Board are not subject to competitive elections, and are essentially appointed by our two major parties. We propose to make it possible for all members of that Board to be selected via a competitive election process. This recommendation is discussed in our Report at Section IIF(1)(k).

### **3. Power to Create or Change Positions, Vacancies and Removal of Officials**

In order to give the Town more flexibility to modify the current roster of appointed officials, boards and commissions, the revised Charter would give the Board of Selectmen the power to add appointed positions and, with the approval of a Town Meeting, reduce or abolish appointed positions. The Board of Selectmen would not have the power to change in any way elected positions or offices, other than adding alternate positions to the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Because of a flaw in the current Charter, it has provisions for addressing a vacancy in the position of First Selectman that are, at best, misleading. The Commission believes it is important to remedy that problem, and has proposed a procedure to address vacancies in the position of First Selectman. The Commission has also added provisions specifying the grounds for, and procedures governing, removal of public officials, which our current Charter does not specifically address.

### **4. Other Changes**

The Commission is recommending certain changes to the existing Charter's conflict of interest section, including an express provision creating the Board of Ethics and requiring a Code of Ethics (neither of which is contained in the current Charter), as well as a provision specifying that the Board of Ethics has authority to interpret the Code of Ethics. These changes establish more clearly the legal framework for the critically important ethical standards of our Town.