

# TOWN OF EAST WINDSOR BOARD OF SELECTMEN

## PUBLIC HEARING

Thursday, July 16, 2020  
7:00 p.m.  
East Windsor, Connecticut

The Public Hearing is being held via ZOOM Teleconference  
Meeting ID: 332 683 3563  
Town Hall closed to the Public by  
Executive Order of First Selectman Jason E. Bowsza  
Due to Coronavirus pandemic

### Meeting Minutes

*\*\*\* These Minutes are not official until approved at a subsequent meeting\*\*\**

### Board of Selectmen:

Jason E. Bowsza, First Selectman  
Marie DeSousa, Deputy First Selectman  
Alan Baker, Selectman  
Sarah Muska, Selectman  
Charlie Nordell, Selectman

**ATTENDANCE:** **Board of Selectmen:** Jason E. Bowsza, First Selectman; Marie DeSousa, Deputy First Selectman; Alan Baker, Selectman; Sarah Muska, Selectman; Charlie Nordell, Selectman

**ABSENT:** All Selectmen were present this evening.

GUESTS signing in to teleconference listed below.

**GUESTS/SPEAKERS:** **Charter Revision Commission:** Rebecca Talamini, Co-Chairman, Nicole Vacila, member; **Board of Education:** Cathy Simonelli, Chairman; **Police Commission:** Robert Leach, Chairman.  
**Public:** Paul Anderson, D. James Barton, Noreen Farmer, Tom Lansner, Chris Ruoss, Heather Spencer, Fred Stucklen; **Attorney Hawks-Ladd, Town Attorney, Pullman & Comley, LLC.**

**Press:** No one from the Press acknowledged themselves.

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**TIME AND PLACE OF REGULAR MEETING:**

First Selectman Bowsza convened the July 16, 2020 Public Hearing to order at 7:01 p.m. The meeting is being held via teleconference due to closure of the Town Hall to the public as the result of the coronavirus epidemic.

First Selectman Bowsza recognized Rebecca Talamini, Co-Chair of the Charter Revision Commission, to give the presentation on the proposed Charter revisions.

Co-Chairman Talamini referenced the document titled “EAST WINDSOR CHARTER, EAST WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT”, noted as received, Town of East Windsor, Town Clerks Office, June 18, 2020, receiving signature – Joanne M. Slater.

Co-Chair Talamini noted the following revisions:

**Section 6-6, D) Town Treasurer** – added “*Finance Director. The Finance Director may be the Town Treasurer.*” - Co-Chair Talamini suggested this revision gives the Town the flexibility to hire either a Town Finance Director, or Town Treasurer, when the position is open.

**Section 6-6, D)(3) Town Treasurer** – revised to read: “*The Town Treasurer shall report to the First Selectman or his/her designee.*” – Co-Chair Talamini suggested the change was made to create better functionality for the town and, to make it more efficient for the First Selectman.

Co-Chair Talamini indicated the reference to “or his/her designee” was made in several places throughout the document.

**Section 8-4 A) Capital Improvements Budget** – changed the appointment of the Capital Improvement Budget from August to September, **and in Section 8-4 A)(3)** – changed language regarding submission of recommendations to “~~no later than November first of each year at the same time as department budgets, as set by the Board of Selectman budget guidelines each year.~~ Co-Chair Talamini suggested that submission clarification would put everything on the same schedule.

**Section 8-4 D – Deliberations on the Proposed Budget (1) The Town Budget sub-section (a) Public Hearings** – Co-Chair Talamini suggested the Committee made a grammatical change regarding publication from 5 days after to 5 days prior.

**Section 8-4 – Budget Procedures (2) The Board of Education Budget (1) Public Hearings** – Co-Chair Talamini suggested a similar grammatical change was made regarding the filing with the Town Clerk the Board of Education’s budget recommendations 5 days prior to the Public Hearing.

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**Section 8-5 – Submission of the Budgets to Referendum, sub-section (4) - Failure of the Budget following the Third Budget Referendum** – Co-Chair Talamini indicated this was the Charter Committee’s main charge to look at. *The new proposed change is after the third referendum vote fails the Budget will be returned to the Board of Finance to establish and approve a Budget for the Town, and they’ll set a mill rate as well.*

Co-Chair Talamini suggested the revisions also included other small grammatical changes.

First Selectman Bowsza thanked the Charter Revision Committee for doing a significant amount of work in a short time. He opened discussion to the public.

**Paul Anderson, 89 Main Street:** Mr. Anderson felt the Committee did a spectacular offer; he’ll definitely support it. He indicated he felt there could be changes down the road to improve on it, however, in this timespan he felt this was all we could ask for. He’s pleased with the submission; he’ll vote yes.

**Fred Stucklen:** Mr. Stucklen felt all of the changes were good, except for Section 8-5 regarding the failure of the third referendum and basically giving the choice of the mill rate directly to the Board of Finance, without any further public input other than the failure of three votes. Mr. Stucklen felt it was out of the question, and takes the town/voter opinion completely out of the referendum process and the setting of the mill rate process. Why have any referendums if you’re just going to give it to the Board of Finance to make the decision? Historically, we’ve argued that this is an under-funded town in a number of ways, and this is the result of that attitude. The end result is that the budget has failed three times multiple years; it doesn’t always pass. But the voters have the last say in the process, and what you’re doing is taking away that process from the voters by giving it to the Board of Finance. Because after the third referendum the Board of Finance can do anything they want under this Charter change. Mr. Stucklen didn’t feel that was legit; he felt it was important to be listening to the voters of the town. If nothing else, have more referendums, or cap it the way it was in some shape or form. But don’t just stop the voter input process and say this is the way it is.

Mr. Stucklen indicated the other fear he had, because of the virus, that this Charter change will not be put before the public; it will be passed because the Governor will say we won’t have any referendums. Mr. Stucklen felt they were using a bad scenario to their advantage to move things around. He didn’t think it reflected the input of the voters in town.

First Selectman Bowsza offered a clarification on the process, noting the intention is for this to be included on the Presidential ballot so whether it’s on the absentee ballot for the Presidential election, or an in-person vote at the Presidential election. This will not just be set by fiat; or if something is put forward, the voters will decide.

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**Ms. Vacila, Charter Revision Committee:** Ms. Vacila suggested to Mr. Stucklen his concerns were a concern of all of their minds as they made that decision, and was the reason she voted against a 15% voter turnout. She wanted to have the voters to have as much say as possible. The reason why they limited it to three is because if you left it unlimited each referendum costs approximately \$5,000, and there was one referendum that went 23 times. Ms. Vacila suggested that obviously, not every one will go 23 times but that number of times multiplied by \$5,000 is an extra \$115,000 that the taxpayers and the voters can't afford to spend. That's why they felt it was in the best interest of everyone, overall, if they limited it to three times and then left it up to people that were elected by the town with financial background to handle the budget. Ms. Vacila asked Mr. Stucklen if that made sense?

Mr. Stucklen suggested it made sense to some degree. He noted he was involved in the whole budgetary process this year. This says that if the Board of Finance says the mill rate should increase by 25% after three referendums they can legally do that. Mr. Stucklen suggested the voters can say they don't want that, but they'll have to wait for a whole election cycle before they can vote those Board members out of service, and by then, the damage is done. Mr. Stucklen didn't feel that was fair to the town to do that. He suggested if you need a limit on the number of referendums then go back to the 2% or whatever percentage was originally put in the Charter to limit the number of referendums and still have some kind of town input on the tax rate. Otherwise, you're taking away the town's input; you're leaving it up to a Board that had been voted in place, but they can do damage. Obviously, the general persuasion of the Board is we've been underfunded for some time. Mr. Stucklen suggested that's not what the townspeople think and that's what you have to go on in terms of how you govern the people in the town.

Ms. Vacila suggested she agreed with Mr. Stucklen, noting another thing that got them to where they ended up was the 2% was just a number that was pulled out of a hat and was hurting the town overall. So, that's why they knew they needed to get rid of it. We're going to try it this way, and if it still doesn't work we can amend and change it in the future. Ms. Vacila wished Mr. Stucklen could have attended more meetings because they had lengthy discussion on all of his concerns. The whole board was in agreement with pretty much everything they came to a conclusion of.

Mr. Stucklen suggested he felt the Board had taken an extreme position, and had gone way to the other extreme in coming up with this proposal. He questioned why not just take the 2% and increase it to 3 or 5%; it still says the town voter population has a say in the mill rate. With this, they don't have any say whatsoever; it's the other extreme. He felt the Board's position was taking a step in the other direction; he felt they would get feedback from the townspeople in the long run.

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First Selectman Bowsza clarified the parameters of speaking during the Public Hearing, specifically giving their name and address and not engaging in back and forth dialogue but rather address the questions raised.

**Chris Rouss, 125 Rockville Road:** Mr. Rouss indicated he supported the comments made by Mr. Stucklen; he's always gone to the referendums. Mr. Rouss indicated he submitted a letter via email expressing his disagreement with this section; he felt it was an "affront" to the people that vote. If they didn't like it, it may not be good for the town but if that's what they want you're telling them they don't know what they're doing. That's the way he reads it, and he's just a voter.

Mr. Rouss suggested that a lot of people he's talked to don't even realize is coming about, but he felt if the JI finally publishes what you're doing this will be voted down.

**Cathy Simonelli, 71 Depot Street:** Mrs. Simonelli cited Section 8-4 D) for the deliberations on the proposed budget, noting the Committee had made the revisions of the timing of the Public Hearing. Mrs. Simonelli indicated the identification was the Board of Education Budget, when it was actually the Superintendent's Budget as the deliberations haven't yet occurred. Similarly, Mrs. Simonelli suggested on the Board of Selectmen side it was actually the First Selectman's Budget until the Board of Selectmen made their deliberations. Mrs. Simonelli indicated they were very particular in keeping it the Superintendent's Budget until the Board of Education has held their deliberations and have voted on it. Mrs. Simonelli requested clarification in that language. She also noted a typo, the word "their" should be deleted.

Mrs. Simonelli indicated she also had suggestions regarding the timing – it says that the First Selectman must decide when the Superintendent must present the Budget to the Board of Education. Mrs. Simonelli indicated they've never really done that; she concurred that the Board of Education had a deadline to have their budget prepared by, and they manage that internally. Mrs. Simonelli suggested discussing that with First Selectman Bowsza; she recalled that none of the First Selectman in the past ten years had given them a date.

First Selectman Bowsza requested Mrs. Simonelli identify the section she's speaking of. Mrs. Simonelli indicated she'll look it up and put it in the chat rather than hold everyone up. [NOTE: Mrs. Simonelli later provided First Selectman Bowsza with identification of Section 8-4 C)(e)].

Regarding the third referendum, Mrs. Simonelli indicated her suggestion would be that if the third referendum fails, then after that, then hold another Public Hearing, as there is after the first and the second (referenda). That gives the Board of Finance an opportunity to hear from the public about why it failed and what they think is important. Mrs. Simonelli then referenced the Committee's many discussions regarding various scenarios, noting - and she realized that having a set percentage, whether it's based on cost of living, or inflation – none of those scenarios worked in every situation appropriately. She hoped the Committee would prepare a write-up to

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explain why you came up with this position for those people who haven't been heavily involved. She felt that would make a difference. Mrs. Simonelli suggested the reason you didn't pick one thing is because no one thing worked, and having a bunch of intelligent people that we've voted in to handle our finances seems to be the right thing to do.

Mrs. Simonelli indicated one of the reasons she's in favor of this is because it does set a deadline for setting the budget. She felt the multiple referendum piece, from the education side, is difficult because there's always an influx of staff in and out at the end of a school year, and as school is ending and Summer is beginning is when the best recruits are available. If their budget isn't finalized they don't know if they can hire because they don't know what they'll have for money. They can't get into the hiring process until they have a budget. So, letting that drag out over the Summer and through multiple referendums hinders their ability of the education department to get quality staff.

Hearing no further public requests to comment, First Selectman Bowsza returned the presentation to Co-Chair Talamini.

Co-Chair Talamini noted two people sent her e-mails regarding grammatical changes. They are the following...

**Section 8-4 D)(1)(a)** – last sentence – there are two “b’s” in the word budget.

**Section 8-10** – it says “*Board of Selectman*” when it should say “*Board of Selectmen*”

Co-Chair Talamini also noted the following additional grammatical revisions:

**Page 42** – also mentioned by Mrs. Simonelli, “their” needs to be removed.

**Section D)(1)(a), and (2)(a)** – regarding deletion of the word “their” budgets.

First Selectman Bowsza called for additional comments from the public:

**James Barton, 158 South Water Street:** Mr. Barton wanted to comment on the budget referenda. He suggested it seemed to him reverting back to the Board of Finance after the three referenda, as has been stated, really makes those votes kind of meaningless. Mr. Barton suggested that over the years he was in support of those restrictions; it makes sense to limit the number of referenda for the reasons stated – cost, and so forth. He realized that others have gone five, six, seven referenda and it takes a lot of time and money. Mr. Barton suggested he didn't think he'd ever seen 23 but he felt it was important to limit that. And, frankly, to limit the spending. The 2% has not served us well and perhaps another percentage would do something better but instead of wasting money on many referenda we're also wasting money on three if those three are going to be rejected, and the Board of Finance is just going to either enact what they were going to enact back in the first place, or maybe something even bigger. He wouldn't support that provision.

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First Selectman Bowsza called for other public comments repeatedly; no one requested to speak. Hearing no further requests for public comment First Selectman Bowsza called for a motion to close the Public Hearing.

**MOTION: To CLOSE the Public Hearing on the Charter revisions at 7:28 p.m.**

**Baker moved/Muska seconded/DISCUSSION: None  
VOTE by rollcall: In Favor: Baker/Nordell/Muska/DeSousa  
(No one opposed/No Abstentions)**

**First Selectman Bowsza declared the Public Hearing CLOSED at 7:28 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted

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Peg Hoffman, Recording Secretary, East Windsor Board of Selectmen