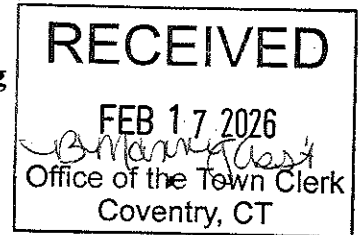


UNOFFICIAL MINUTES
Town of Coventry Charter Revision Commission Meeting
February 4, 2026 6:30 PM
Town Hall Annex



1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to order by Commission Chair Mike Petro at 6:30 PM.

Members Present: Mike Petro-Chairman, Justin Murphy-Vice Chairman, Monica Gallegos-Ramirez-Secretary, Jen Beausoleil, John Elsesser, and Cheryl Resha.

Members Absent: Tim Liptrap

Also Present: James Drumm-Town Manager, and Alex Taylor-Special Projects Coordinator.

2. Audience of Citizens: (30 Minutes - 5 Minutes maximum per citizen): None

3. Approval Of Minutes:

A. Minutes, January 15, 2026:

Motion: I move to accept the January 15, 2026, Charter Revision Commission Meeting Minutes.

By: Elsesser

Second: Murphy

Discussion/Edits:

- Pg. 4, 5th paragraph, 1st line, change “Chater” to “Charter”.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

4. Review of Changes from Prior Meeting:

Beausoleil requested that dates be added to the comments in the working document, so the Commission can track when the changes were made. Taylor confirmed he will do this moving forward.

The Commission discussed the attorney’s feedback on previous matters, including switching from 2 districts to 1. The attorney was in support of language that states “at least 1 voting district” and suggested including language in the Charter that the Town Council could increase the number of voting districts by ordinance. This allows the town flexibility, especially if there are future legislation changes. The commission discussed different ways this could be worded. It was agreed upon to have Murphy workshop some legal language to be reviewed next meeting.

The Commission noted that in Section 2-4, Murphy’s proposed language regarding tabulators had been incorporated. Beausoleil confirmed that the language does not exclude the use of paper ballots should it be necessary. Murphy confirmed and explained that the Registrars and Town Clerk reviewed the language as well and did not see any issues.

Beausoleil pointed out that requested adjustments were made to Section 3-1 as well. It was discussed that the changes removed the ambiguity from previous language on whether BOE members could serve on the Town Council. This has been clarified to show BOE members/teachers can serve on the Town Council.

Elsesser raised potential concerns with whether the language should be further clarified to restrict volunteer members of the Fire/EMS Departments from serving on the Town Council, as they are technically employees of the town. It was considered that language could be added to the Charter to restrict that only 1 member from the department could serve in order to prohibit having majority on the Council. Resha stated that there are typically rules for conflict of interest. If there is a vote being taken on something for the fire department and a there is a fireman serving on the Town Council, they would need to recuse themselves from the vote. It was stated that this is a typical practice, but not a requirement. The Commission felt that the language in Section 3-1 should remain as is and not carve out a special exception for volunteer firefighters. It was reminded that volunteer firefighters could serve on other town boards, should they want to be more civically involved, without having to serve on the Town Council.

Murphy shared that he came up with draft language regarding the Town Manager's authority to hire and fire, and proposed the following as a new section, Section 5-4: Personnel Authority:

Except as otherwise provided in this charter, or by the Connecticut General Statutes, the Town Manager shall have the authority to appoint, hire, supervise, discipline, suspend, and remove all officers and employees of the town. Such authority shall include the establishment of personnel policies, job classifications, and compensation plans subject to the approval of the Town Council where required by this Charter. Nothing herein shall be construed to limit the authority of the Board of Education over employees of the school system.

Beausoleil questioned if the language requires the Town Manager to get approval from the Town Council for the compensation of every person he hires. Murphy explained yes, but for a compensation plan, not individual salaries.

It was explained that the Town Manager has some flexibility when hiring and offering compensation, as the Town Council has to approve the compensation plan ranges ahead of time. Elsesser and Drumm explained how compensation is factored into the hiring process, and money can be moved around in order to get the best candidate if there is enough money in the salaries line item for that specific department/union. Drumm explained that there are only about 10 positions that are not a part of a union contract. It was clarified that if a salary was to be offered outside of the compensation range, Town Council approval would be needed. Overall, the language provided by Murphy does not restrict the Town Manager during the hiring process or change how it is done.

The Charter Revision Commission had consensus to add Murphy's suggested language into the Charter as Section 5-4: Personnel Authority.

Beausoleil stated that Murphy's wording is clearer than what is written in 7-2 and felt it could be removed. Murphy agreed that it was redundant. Taylor stated that it makes more sense for compensation to be included with the Town Manager chapter, rather than with Bonds. Elsesser agreed and felt the article name could be changed from "Bonds and Compensation" to just "Bonds".

The Commission discussed removing article 7 completely, after reviewing the attorney's feedback, which suggested that bonds and insurance do not necessarily belong in the Charter. Elsesser noted that there are a few positions required by state statute to have insurance coverage, like the Tax Collector. It was discussed that there are state statutes and requirements that require towns to indemnify employees for acts performed within the scope of their employment. Murphy stated that it is up to the Commission to decide whether it be included in the Charter for the town to maintain adequate insurance to cover indemnification obligations. This could be done by changing the title and purpose of article 7.

Elsesser stated that the Charter should include language that protects the town, requiring insurance or bonds, not just authorizing their ability to do so.

The Commission had consensus to change the title of Article 7 to Indemnification. Elsesser suggested changing the wording in Section 7-1, to remove the list of positions, and replace them with the language, "all employees of the town, and appointed members of boards and commissions". Beausoleil felt that the paragraph should be sent to the attorney, with the request that the Commission wants language related to indemnification and liability coverage, instead of what is currently written about bonds. Murphy suggested that the attorney shouldn't be rewriting sections. He felt the Commission should figure out what they want this section to say, and what the Charter should require the town to indemnify. Murphy explained he can draft some language but needs to know what the goal is. It was discussed that the Commission wants to make State Statute 7-465 obligatory in Coventry's Charter. Murphy explained that he will draft something for 7-1 to ensure that volunteers and Town Councilors are covered along with town employees. The town attorney can then review his draft.

Murphy discussed Drumm's proposed language to be included in the Charter for acting Town Manager. He explained that the 2nd paragraph seemed to be the best plan for middle ground. Beausoleil agreed. Beausoleil questioned why Drumm selected a time maximum of 1 month, when a vacation is typically no longer than 2 weeks, and a disability is around 6 weeks. Drumm explained that he has not seen issues with 30 days but has seen issues with the 90 days as the Town Council would need to appoint someone new every 90 days, constantly changing the acting Town Manager. Murphy suggested including language that does not preclude the Town Council from reappointing the same individuals for extended successive periods. Murphy continued that he likes having a deadline, as it requires action to be taken, even if the action is reappointing the same individual for another 90 days.

Different concerns and absent Town Manager scenarios were discussed. The Commission decided to change the Town Council timeline of 90 days to 180 days, and adding language that allows the Town Council to remove the acting Town Manager by a two-thirds vote of full membership at any time. Taylor will add this to replace the existing language of Section 5-3 in the revised Charter draft for review at the next meeting.

Taylor reminded that there was a comment to revisit 6, as at a previous meeting not all members were present. However, since Liptrap was absent from this meeting, the Commission opted to revisit Chapter 6 at another meeting, to have all members review and chime in as it is an important section of the Charter.

Additional Changes Summary:

- Taylor to add dates to the comments on the “working” draft of the Charter.
- Include Murphy’s drafted language as a new section, Section 5-4: Personnel Authority.
- Change Chapter 7 to “Indemnification”.
- Add Drumm’s “Acting Town Manager” draft language as Section 5-3, with the change of 90 days to 180 days, and including a two-thirds vote of a full Council to revoke the appointment.

5. Review and Discussion of Charter Chapter VIII- Finance and Taxation:

Beausoleil stated that while reviewing Chapter 8, the Commission should consider Chapter 9 as well, as budget related items are in both Chapters. She felt that things in Chapter 9, should be moved to Chapter 8, for a better flow. The Commission agreed that some things need to be moved, but opted to review Chapter 8 first, then do Chapter 9, and move items at that time without doing a simultaneous back and forth.

Section 8-1. Fiscal Year:

The Commission had consensus to leave as is.

Section 8-2. Borrowing:

The Commission had consensus to leave as is.

Section 8-3. General Form of Budget Presentation:

Beausoleil suggested that the first line, should read, “The Town Manager shall...” instead of how it currently reads, “The Town Manager may, or at the request of the Town Council, shall...”. The Commission agreed to move the comma after shall so that the line reads, “The Town Manager may, or at the request of the council shall, require each department...”, which cleans up the sentence and meaning. Beausoleil also asked that “board of education” be capitalized in this section.

Petro pointed out that in the 2nd line of the paragraph, “Town” is missing the “T” and needs to be added back in.

Beausoleil asked for clarification on what the following meant, “*town manager may prescribe, a program or programs showing services, activities and work accomplished during the current year and to be accomplished during the ensuing year*”. Elsesser explained that it would be the Town Manager requesting a summary of what the department did, why they are getting money, and what was accomplished versus what was planned. She understood that it was to get more information on department tasks, not just expenditures.

Murphy suggested adding the word “fiscal” between “current” and “year” in the 4th line for further clarification.

Section 8-4. Departmental Estimates:

The Commission pointed out that several titles need to be capitalized throughout the paragraph, including “town manager” and “board of education.”

Drumm noted that the dates listed for deadlines are not followed specifically, but things are typically done before. Elsesser noted that the language states “on or before March 12.”

Beausoleil commented that part of the Commission's charge is to look at the budget timeline and was curious when the Commission wanted to work through that. It was discussed that the wording should be ironed out 1st, and then dates can be adjusted. Additionally, Taylor reminded that the Collector of Revenue and Finance Director are scheduled to come to the next meeting, and budget dates and timelines would be best discussed with them for input.

Drumm explained that the dates are set by the Charter, but per State Statute, the Town Council can override the Charter by resolution to alter the budget dates, for a better timeline each fiscal year. The point of this is to have better information regarding state aid when putting together the budget. Elsesser explained that some years are shorter than others, and state aid will be known prior to finalizing the budget. However, there are some years with longer legislative sessions, where state aid remains unknown until after the 1st referendum or later.

Beausoleil added that the health insurance numbers, which make up a large portion of the budget, are not solid estimates in February, when the numbers are supposed to go to the Town Manager from the BOE. She explained that there are other items that the BOE could have more accurate estimates on if the Town Meeting and budget presentation to the Town Council were later in March.

Petro explained that they can go back to timelines after next meetings, but there seems to be a desire for a longer budget timeline to allow for more clarity around state aid, and the need to meet town meeting requirements.

Beausoleil continued that in order for the Board of Ed to meet the Charter and Town Manager deadlines, need to vote in early February on the appropriation request. She stressed that in early February, the estimates are very rough in a number of categories. She stressed that the Charter focuses on the Town Council and Town Manager's role for the budget, but all town departments and BOE are working 60-90 days ahead of the timeline, and the information they provide is reflective of that time. She continued that there would be more clarity in the estimates if the town waited longer.

Petro suggested making a note in this section to revisit the dates once the Commission gets through Sections 8 and 9.

Section 8-5. Duties of the Town Manager on the Budget:

Elsesser suggested making a note to revisit the 100-day timeline. Beausoleil also suggested instead having a firm date, rather than "100 days". This makes it clearer and a set date year after year.

Beausoleil questioned the 3rd sentence in the last paragraph which states, "As part of the budget, the town manager shall present a program previously considered and acted upon by the town planning and zoning commission in accordance with the General Statutes, of proposed municipal improvement projects for the ensuing fiscal year and for the five (5) fiscal years thereafter.". She stated that the Capital Improvement Plan includes more than what Planning and Zoning votes on. Drumm explained that they get a copy and discuss town growth that falls under their purview. Elsesser commented that CT General Statutes 8-24 needs to be looked up and referenced in this section. It was clarified that the Planning and Zoning Commission "acts upon" improvement plans by voting on what they recommend, and what they don't. Ultimately, the final say lies with

the Town Council. Murphy commented that the purpose of this is to see what Capital Improvements included in the budget were recommended by the PZC. Drumm added that having the PZC review all projects removed the need to bring projects to them on a case-by-case basis.

Section 8-6. Duties of the Council:

The Commission agreed to change the reference of “70 days prior to the end of the fiscal year” to an actual calendar date.

Murphy questioned the sentence, “*The town manager shall cause sufficient copies of said estimates to be made available for general distribution in the office of the town clerk at least ten (10) days prior to the public hearing.*” He was unsure why it was included under “Duties of the Council”. The Commission discussed this in detail and felt it was fine to leave the sentence in Section 8-6. However, the “10 days prior” is being removed as the Town Manager’s budget is not even presented to the Town Council 10 days prior to public hearing.

Beausoleil reminded that the notification requirements (i.e. newspaper publications) were discussed and modified previously, and the same language should be used in this section. Murphy agreed, and stated it was done in Section 1-4, and that should be referenced in the 4th sentence of 8-6.

Murphy pointed out that “10 days prior” to the annual meeting is referenced in the 4th sentence as well and should be removed, so that it just states “prior to annual meeting”. Drumm explained that the numbers would be available at that time, so the wording is fine as is.

Murphy shared concerns with the last sentence, as it allows a small percentage of the town’s population to make budget decisions that are not reflective of the whole town. He suggested including the language, “The annual budget shall be presented for discussion at a town meeting and submitted directly to a referendum vote. No amendment shall be permitted at such meeting.” He shared frustration over not being able to attend the Annual Town Meeting last year. It was noted that a Saturday 10AM meeting is often a tough swing for residents, specifically families. Resha also explained that with the town meeting, either political party could stack the room and vote to lower the budget. She suggested removing that language or changing the wording to include that a vote could require the Town Council to revisit the budget based on suggestions before referendum, not allowing authority for the budget to be lowered without a referendum.

Elsesser shared that he dealt with this frustration for many years. He suggested that the town does not hold a referendum if the budget comes in with a tax increase lower than the rate of inflation. He shared that people don’t seem to recognize that things go up in cost. After decades of having below inflationary increases, it means that staff can’t do their job. Beausoleil shared an example where someone motioned to eliminate the bus service for the school district. She explained that this could not be done, as bus transportation is required by State Statute. The individual then motioned to reduce the BOE budget by the cost of bus transportation, which was roughly \$900,000. She continued that meeting doesn’t allow for information gathering or discussions on major decisions. This allows whoever happens to be there to make motions that can be devastating to town and BOE services.

Murphy reminded that the changes the Commission proposes for the Charter can be presented in multiple questions, especially if there are controversial matters. He stated that the budget increase under inflation rates, not going to referendum, could be a separate question for the vote on proposed Charter revisions.

Drumm noted how times have changed, and back in the day, people used to be educated on the budget and were able to vote on the floor of an annual meeting. However, populations have increased, raising the number of voters, but most are uninformed. Now, more people are voting, but there is a percentage of the population the simply votes "No" the 1st time around, with hopes that the budget will be lower the 2nd time around. He explained that Manchester does not have a referendum vote. Instead, the Town Council votes on the budget, and that becomes the budget. He further explained that Taylor has researched other places, and there are different ways to go about the budget. Drumm spoke on the budget process in North Brandford, where they have a similar process for meetings and referendums, but it is required that 15% of registered voters vote otherwise the proposed Town Council budget stands. He explained that this may be a good option to increase voter turnout/participation.

Beausoleil commented that she liked that model for the Annual Town Meeting, as it requires a specific percentage of the registered voters in order to make changes, otherwise the meeting adjourns to referendum. Drumm agreed that requiring a percentage of registered voters and property owners gives a snapshot of how the community feels about the budget. Based on the vote of the required percentage, they can either choose to continue working on the budget or adjourn to referendum.

Beausoleil explained that she is not in favor of a required percentage or minimum number of registered voters for the referendum vote but is in favor of a required percentage or minimum number of registered voters for amending the Council's recommended budget at the Annual Town Meeting.

Motion: I move to continue the remainder of Chapter 8 and the rest of the agenda to the next meeting.

By: Resha

Second: Murphy

Discussion: The Commission discussed that they would review budget timelines, along with the timeline for the remainder of the Charter Revision Commission meetings to ensure they are on track. Elsesser suggested the Commission review Section 9-4 prior to the next meeting, as it calls for an overview of Town Council actions by 3% of the voters. He suggested that similar logic could be used for the budget.

Petro noted that it was agreed that the Commission will work on the remainder of Chapter 8, and Chapter 9 at the next meeting (Feb. 19th).

Vote: Unanimously in favor

Section 8-7. Adoption of the Budget:

Section 8-8. Expenditures and Accounting:

Chapter 8-Final Suggestions Summary:

- Section 8-3, 1st line move comma from after “Town Council” to after “shall”.
- Section 8.3, 1st sentence, capitalize “board of education”.
- Section 8-3, 2nd line, change “own” to “Town”
- Section 8-3, 4th line, change “current year” to “current fiscal year”.
- Section 8-4, throughout paragraph capitalize “town manager” and “board of education”
- Section 8-4, make a note to revisit for dates/timelines
- Section 8-5, provide an actual calendar date for 100 days before the end of the fiscal year.
- Section 8-6, provide an actual calendar date for 70 days before the end of the fiscal year.
- Section 8-6, change, “The town manager shall cause sufficient copies of said estimates to be made available for general distribution in the office of the town clerk at least ten (10) days prior to the public hearing.” to “The town manager shall cause sufficient copies of said estimates to be made available for general distribution in the office of the town clerk prior to the public hearing.”
- Section 8-6, 4th sentence, change 1st line to read “Not less than ten (10) days prior to the annual budget meeting, the council shall cause to be published notice in accordance with Section 1-4 of the Charter...”

6. Planning of Meetings and Discussion of Charter With Town Staff: No Discussion.

7. Other Business: None

8. Adjournment:

Motion: I move to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 PM

By: Resha

Second: Beausoleil

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 9:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault, Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Charter Revision Commission at the next Charter Revision Commission meeting. Please see the next Charter Revision Commission meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.