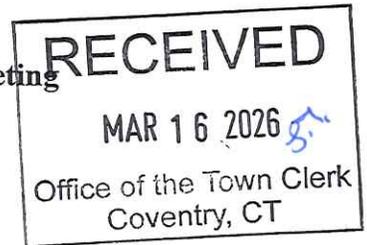


UNOFFICIAL MINUTES
Town of Coventry Charter Revision Commission Meeting
March 4, 2026 6:30 PM
Town Hall Annex



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, John Elsesser, Jen Beausoleil, Cheryl Resha and Tim Liptrap (Joined Remotely at 7:25 PM).

Members Absent: None

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

2. Audience of Citizens: (30 Minutes - 5 Minutes maximum per citizen):

Mary Ann Hansen, 74 Avery Shores:

Hansen proposed that the Charter Revision Commission consider a Board of Ethics to handle potential conflict of interest situations, as an unbiased, impartial board. She reminded that the Town Council appoints members of Boards and Commissions, so when a conflict-of-interest issue arises on a Board or Commission, it is brought to the Town Council, which is similar to 'policing oneself'. She felt this would be a good idea as the town gets larger and problems are more complex. She informed that there are other towns, like Vernon, who utilize a similar Board of Ethics.

3. Approval Of Minutes:

A. Minutes, February 4, 2026:

Motion: I move to accept the February 4, 2026, Charter Revision Commission Meeting Minutes.

By: Elsesser

Second: Beausoleil

Discussion/Edits:

- Pg. 2, 2nd paragraph. 1st sentence, change, "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." to "Elsesser raised potential concerns with whether the language should be further clarified regarding volunteer members, for example members of the Fire Departments serving on the Town Council."

Motion: I move to accept the February 4, 2026, Charter Revision Commission Meeting Minutes as amended.

By: Beausoleil

Second: Murphy

Vote: Unanimously in favor

4. Review of Changes from Prior Meetings:

Murphy discussed the proposed language he offered to draft last meeting:

Section 2-3: Voting Districts:

Murphy reiterated his proposed language, “There should be a minimum of one voting district, and the number of voting districts may be increased or decreased, and the boundaries altered by ordinance of the town council.” which he felt is simplified but also requires the Town Council to create an ordinance to change the number of voting districts from 2 to 1. He reminded that the current Charter requires that the town has 2 voting districts, and his proposed language does not automatically make the change in number of districts.

Beausoleil proposed language that clarifies that from the date of enactment of this version of the Charter, there will be only 1 voting district. It was also suggested that this be discussed with the Town Council, as to what they prefer. The Commission had consensus to add language to the Charter to explicitly stating that the town will have 1 voting district in place with the effective date of the new version of the Charter, if passed. It will be discussed with the Town Council during the review and can be changed if they disagree or want to draft an ordinance for the change.

Beausoleil proposed the following language to be added to the Charter, “There shall be one voting district. The number of voting districts may be increased or decreased, and the boundaries altered by ordinance.” Petro suggested adding “of the Town Council” after “ordinance”, as it is an administration function of the Town. The Commission agreed.

Section 7-1: Official Bonds:

Murphy reminded that the Commission had a lengthy discussion and ultimately decided to include language that would ensure the town would be obligated to indemnify employees and volunteers serving on commissions. He commented that he did not come up with language as, following further review, he found it unnecessary under current CT General State Statutes. He explained there are 2 statutes that may cover this section:

1. “Assumption of liability for damage caused by employee of the municipality or a member of the local emergency training district.” He explained this covers the town for damage of a person’s property.
2. CGS 7-101A-Protection of municipal officers and municipal employees from damage suits. Reimbursement of defense expenses, liability insurance, time limit for filing notice, and commencement of action. This statute states: “Each municipality shall protect and save harmless any municipal officer, whether elected or appointed, of any board, committee, council, agency, or commission, including any member of any local emergency planning committee appointed from such municipality...”

It was discussed whether to have Section 7 of the Charter remain, with references to CT General State Statutes. Points were made that leaving Section 7 with references to CGS is more clear for employees, volunteers, etc., versus including the indemnification language in the employee and volunteer handbook. The Commission wanted to avoid confusion, and make sure whichever language included was still applicable.

Elsesser was concerned if indemnification, or bonds for employees, were left out of the Charter that employees may feel threatened. The Commission discussed that it would be Drumm’s responsibility to ensure that they are covered under state statute, and evidence or letters from CIRMA and the Town Attorney.

Taylor explained that the Town Attorney was asked about whether bonds should remain in the Charter. The Town Attorneys response indicated that statutory bonds for most town officials were repealed in 1982, and that he felt it was unnecessary for it to remain in the Charter. He added that it is likely in the insurance coverage for the town for those who handle money. Additionally, the insurance carriers can advise on necessary coverage.

The Commission had consensus to strike Section 7: Bonds and Compensation/Indemnification but reserve the section for future use if needed.

Suggested changes:

- Section 2-3, add, “There shall be one voting district. The number of voting districts may be increased or decreased, and the boundaries altered by ordinance of the Town Council.”
- Strike Section 7 (remove title and leave blank) but reserve the Section in the Charter for the time being.

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

Beausoleil commented that in Chapter 8, the Town Meeting is referenced quite a bit, but it is the subject of the following Chapter (9). She felt that the Town Meeting should be defined before discussing them in the budget process. She noted that Chapter 7 is now “blank”, and it could be moved to that. The Commission agreed to do what is logical but decided to work through Chapters 8 and 9 before moving things around.

Section 8-1. Fiscal Year: No further discussion at this time.

Section 8-2. Borrowing:

Beausoleil discussed that in Section 8-2, it states that at the Annual Town Meeting, there is a vote to allow the Town Manager to do temporary borrowing for operations, until tax collections catch up. She was curious if this has to happen at Town Meeting per state statute, or if the Town Council could vote to authorize this. There was discussion around this that ultimately determined it was best to ask the Town Attorney. Beausoleil felt it was best to have the Town Council make this decision as they are the fiduciary municipal agency. Resha agreed as, if the voters decided to not grant the Town Manager that authority, then the Town Manager would not be able to run the Town. Murphy also agreed that these decisions should not be made by the few who attend the Town Meeting. Taylor will reach out to the attorney.

Section 8-3. General Form of Budget Presentation: No further discussion at this time

Section 8-4. Departmental Estimates:

Beausoleil explained that she would like to see the comma separated items listed as bullets or sub-sections. The Commission reviewed and felt it was fine as is.

The Commission also reviewed the budget process from the Town Manager’s proposal to referendum to determine if anything needs to be removed.

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

Beausoleil shared concerns with the dates included, and that town departments are required to give their budgets to the Town Manager by March 12th, and then the Town Manager needs to provide his budget to the Town

Council by March 22nd which is a tight timeline. Drumm explained that it is typically done much earlier. Beausoleil also discussed that it would be better to have these dates more into spring, as there would be a better idea of revenues from the state or required mandates included in state legislature. She reminded that in order for the BOE to get their budget to the Town Manager, they are working on it in early February and none of this information is available. Elsesser suggested that the dates for BOE could be moved, and it does not impact the town department budgets. Those can still move forward with the budget process, if the BOE needs more time.

It was also reminded that the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) is due in December. However, it is a little more flexible should a priority item need to be added last minute. Beausoleil explained that this is different than the BOE budget where appropriations need to be supplied by early February, and the budget only ever gets decreased regardless of if there is reduced state funding or costly mandates. This requires the BOE to make estimated guesses rather than having more accurate figures. She explained that they usually have to make a guess with the health insurance figure, which is a large line item in the budget. She felt that the BOE appropriate does not need to go to the Town Manager much earlier than the Town Council presentation as he does not make changes to the BOE proposal. She feels the BOE's estimates should be provided to the Town Manager on a date closer to his presentation to the Town Council. Drumm felt that moving the BOE timeline would not give the BOE that much more time, to the point of getting more accurate numbers, unless the entire budget time frame was changed.

Drumm explained that he and Elsesser discussed moving the budget timeline previously, but it was determined that voters don't typically vote the budget down due to the accuracy of legislature numbers. Additionally, moving the timeline results in a shorter time frame to turnaround the budget for a 2nd vote should it fail the 1st time. Beausoleil proposed moving the referendum 2 weeks, so it's the 3rd week in May, allowing for the Annual Town Meeting to be held in May instead of April. This would give a better idea of the budget negotiations happening in legislature, or they may even be completed during a short session. The Commission discussed the feasibility of moving these dates, with getting tax bills out on time. It was determined to be tight, but doable.

Elsesser proposed that after 3 failed budget votes, the budget would automatically get adopted using 2%. Drumm shared that there are some communities that after 3 months, the Town Council's last version is what is adopted, and they have the ability to make changes. Beausoleil shared another option, modeled after Bolton's process, that after the 1st budget fails the town moved to a two-week cycle until it passes. There were concerns that Elsesser's proposal would be taking away the taxpayers' right to cut the budget, as well as incentivizing to continue to vote the budget down.

Discussion continued on different timelines for the budget process in terms of Annual Town Meeting and the referendum, as well as the option to move the Annual Town Meeting from a Saturday to a weekday night.

Resha commented that she was in favor of moving the dates 2 weeks, to know more of what the legislative bill will look like. It was discussed that this would put the Annual Town Meeting right at Mother's Day and during many college graduations.

The Commission suggested taking the Board of Ed out of the estimates section, and adding a separate sentence to clarify the BOE is to have their estimates by a "no later than date".

The Commission discussed the Council reviewing the Town Manager's proposed budget before the hearing. Elsesser advised against this and felt that the hearing should remain before the Council's public review process. Murphy commented that the Charter states the public hearing can be no later than April 21st, which is well after the scheduled date of March 5th for this year. Elsesser explained that the timeframe had been moved up as the for an accelerated budget process as the existing Charter timeframes do not allow for a turnaround if needed.

It was determined not to move any official dates listed in the Charter but reminded that there is flexibility internally to move dates if needed.

Section 8-6. Duties of the Town Council:

Beausoleil shared that there seems to be a problem with the dates, as the materials need to be provided 10 days prior to the presentation at the Annual Town Meeting. It was discussed that citizens really only need 48 hrs. ahead of time, with the materials being available electronically. The Commission suggested replacing the requirement for materials from 10 days prior to the meeting to 48 hrs. prior to the meeting or public hearing (throughout Section 8 and 9).

There was some confusion about the terms "Annual Town Meeting" and "Budget Meeting". It was confirmed that they are the same thing. However, a public hearing is different. The materials availability requirement is the same for both. It was clarified that the notice of the meeting needs to remain 10 days prior as that is what is required by state statutes.

Beausoleil shared that she has heard that taxpayers don't agree with the Annual Town Meeting, as it allows those in attendance to modify the budget, and the attendance at this meeting is not an accurate representation of all taxpayers. Murphy reminded that he proposed a threshold is needed in order to make changes, for example 5% of registered voters. He also suggested that the Commission considers that changes could be made to increase the budget, as currently at the Annual Town Meeting only decreases are allowed to be made. He proposed the following language to be added to the end of Section 8-6, replacing the last sentence:

At the annual budget meeting, the town council recommended budget may be amended, (either to increase or decrease) any appropriation provided that no such amendment shall be adopted unless at least (5%) of the registered voters, or eligible taxpayers, of the town, as determined by the latest official registry list, are present and voting at such meeting. If fewer than (5%) of such voters, or eligible taxpayers, are present voting, no amendment shall be made to the Town Council recommended budget and shall proceed to referendum without modification.

The Commission agreed that this is a good idea. It was also discussed that the CHS Auditorium holds up to 700 people, so there is some wiggle room before they would run out of space if a full 5% (roughly 500 people) showed up.

Elsesser shared that he does not disagree with the thought but had concerns that this large of a change would not allow the Charter to pass. It was thought that this revision could be separated out as its own question, if it was felt the item was controversial. It was also discussed that instead of a percentage of voters, it could be based on

an expenditure increase. Some towns don't send their budgets to vote at all if the expenditure increase is more than 2% or 3%, or if the expenditure increase is less than 3% than an amendment is not allowed. Murphy shared concerns that this idea would be hard to pass. However, others felt it was a good base starting point seeing how the Charter has not been revised in so long.

Elsesser continued to share concerns with this big of a change and felt it would discourage engagement as the town would never be able to meet the thresholds. Other Commission members disagreed and felt that it could encourage more engagement if those who want to vote for increase would be incentivized to show up. Additionally, the Town Meeting would still serve its purpose of being informational about the budget. They stressed that the only thing that this revision changes is allowing a small percentage of taxpayers voting for decreases at the budget. Beausoleil reminded that the Annual Town Meeting and referendum would still exist, but amendments to the budgets would not be able to be made unless the proposed threshold was met. She continued that if people don't approve of the budget, they vote no at the referendum.

Drumm reminded that there is no way to know if the budget fails, if voters voted 'No' because they felt the budget was too high or too low. Beausoleil felt that enough feedback is typically given from the community. Drumm mentioned the possibility of a poll being available. Resha added that this type of question was included on the budget vote in another town. At the 1st referendum the budget failed as the citizens felt it was too low, which was indicated with their vote. She added that they increased the budget and it passed the 2nd time around.

The discussion around the budget amendment threshold continued. It was suggested that the 5% of registered voters be reduced to 3%, which is still more than how many typically attend. Liptrap shared what other towns around the state do regarding budget amendments, which vary from 100 registered voters to 5% of registered voters being able to vote for a change in the increase or decrease. The Commission discussed that they want to have the threshold continue to include registered voters and eligible property owners. The Commission still agreed to a 3% of registered voters, or eligible property owners, to vote on an increase or decrease to the budget at the Annual Town Meeting.

Murphy noted that similar language from Section 8-6 is in Section 9-1 and would need to be replaced with the revised language as proposed for 8-6. The Commission agreed.

Murphy found information that that notice of the Annual Budget Meeting could be 5 days instead of the current stated 10 days. The Commission agreed to make that change in Section 8-6, if allowed. Taylor will confirm with the town attorney.

Section 8-7. Adoption of the Budget:

Beausoleil noted that some Charters reference when and how the Town Council can set the mil rate and felt it would be good for Coventry to do the same. She shared concerns for when the budget fails to get adopted by the beginning of the fiscal year and the impact on tax payments.

Section 8-8. Expenditures and Accounting:

Beausoleil stated there is a reference to ‘checks’ in subsection (b) and felt that the term should be ‘payment’ or something else generic.

Elsesser suggested double checking the job descriptions to make sure that the correct positions are listed in the subsections as referred to in state statute.

Liptrap questioned the Town Manager’s authority to use emergency spending during a situation like a natural disaster. It was explained that this authority is already given in the budget. If it was a large amount, Drumm stated that the Council should be involved anyways. Funds could be allocated from the 1.5% fund.

Liptrap also asked if in subsection (h) the term “knowingly” should be changed to a different term. Commission members felt it was fine as is. The removal of employees with cause was discussed. Taylor noted that many removals are typically governed by contracts.

Chapter 8-Final Suggestions Summary:

- Section 8-2: Taylor to ask the Attorney if it is required to have a vote at Town Meeting for temporary borrowing for operations between tax collection, and if it could be replaced by a vote of the Town Council.
- Section 8-6: Instances of materials being required 10 days prior to public hearing or Annual Town Meeting is to be changed to 48 hrs. prior.
- Section 8-6, include Murphy’s proposed language, replacing the last sentence of the section, with the indication to include registered voters and eligible taxpayers, and a reduction of the threshold percentage from 5% to 3%.
- Section 8-6, change “Not less than ten (10) days prior to the annual budget meeting...” to “Not less than five (5) days prior to the annual budget meeting”.
- Section 8-8, subsection (b), change “checks” to “payments” and “countersigned” to “approved”.
- Section 8-8, subsection (c), “town” is missing a “t”.
- Section 8-8, subsection (h), last line, change “his” to “their”.

Motion: I move to continue all remaining agenda items to the next meeting, on March 19th.

By: Liptrap

Second: Resha

Discussion: It was clarified that the Finance Director and Collector of Revenue will be at the next meeting. Resha also noted that she found that the Annual Town Meeting needs to be by the 1st Monday in May, which is likely why it is in the Charter to be no later than the last Saturday of April.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

6. Review and Discussion of Charter Chapter IX-The Town Meeting: Continued.

Section 9-1. Annual and Special Meetings:

Section 9-2. Procedure:

Section 9-3. When Action by Town Meeting Required:

Section 9-4. Petition for Overture of Action of Council:

Section 9-5. Petition for Enactment of Ordinances:

Chapter 9-Final Suggestions Summary:

7. Planning of Meetings and Discussion of Charter With Town Staff: Continued.

8. Review of Charter Revision Schedule:

Taylor reminded that this item was added at the request of the Commission and asked the Commission to review the timeline for when things need to be finished. Petro agreed and reminded that the Commission added a third meeting in March, set for the 25th, in order to meet the deadlines.

The Commission also reminded that they have regularly scheduled meetings Wednesday, April 1st and Thursday, April 16th. Additionally, a special meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, April 8th.

9. Other Business: Continued.

10. Adjournment:

Beausoleil motioned to adjourn at 9:06 PM, seconded by Murphy. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 9:06 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.