



CHESTER GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Report to the Board of Selectmen

February 15, 2023

Chester Governance Study Committee Agenda

Committee Introductions

Board of Selectmen Issues

Charge

Process

Findings

Potential Next Steps

Q&A



Chester Governance Study Committee

Pat Bandzes

Briana Jewczyn

Jon Joslow, Co-Chair

Cindy Lignar

Ed Meehan

Michael Sanders, Co-Chair

Richard Strauss



Board of Selectmen Charge to the Committee

- **Identify and analyze alternative governance structures for the purpose of improving the Town's ability to proactively plan and manage its affairs**
- **Recommend next steps to achieve these prospective improvements, as indicated by the findings and conclusions**



Board of Selectmen Issues

Complexity

- Increased complexity of municipal management
- Maintaining adequate staffing levels of qualified/certified staff
- Diffused executive governance authority

Continuity

- All current Selectmen do not intend to run for re-election in November 2023

Engagement

- Finding volunteers to fill vacancies on boards and commissions
- Low town meeting (legislative body) participation



Process

- **Identify and define options to our Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government**
- **Interview other towns to understand how they have addressed their issues and concerns, including through changes to their form of government**
- **Identify potential next steps to consider to address Chester's issues with and without changing our form of government**



Findings

- **Interviews with other municipal leaders confirm that Chester's challenges and issues are not unique**
- **Many issues can be addressed administratively and by ordinance without changing our form of government**
- **Addressing overarching, complex issues may require a change to our structure only accomplished through a charter**



Forms of Local Government



Connecticut Forms of Municipal Government

STATE STATUTE (Chester)		
Executive Authority	Legislative Body	Fiscal Authority
First Selectman (CEO) Board of Selectmen	Town Meeting	Board of Finance

CHARTER		
Executive (CEO)	Legislative Body	Fiscal Authority
First Selectman Mayor Town Manager	Board of Selectmen/Town Meeting Board of Alderman or City Council Town Council	Board of Finance and/or Alternatives per Charter



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Professional Manager – appointed position; selected based on education, experience, skills, and abilities – not political allegiances

- Delegated responsibility by Board of Selectmen through First Selectman; or
- Statutory responsibility as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Reports to Board of Selectman/Council



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Connecticut: 169 Cities and Towns

56 (33%) - Non-Charter: Selectmen-Town Meeting

113 (67%) - Charter: Options based on Charter



Forms of Government Comparison

Connecticut & Nationally

Connecticut by Population Range

CONNECTICUT FORMS OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	POPULATION RANGE (PR)	PR: 781 - 27,522		PR: 27,523 - 148,333		TOTALS	
		#	% OF FORM BY PR	#	% OF FORM BY PR	#	% OF # OF MUNICIPALITIES BY FORM TO TOTAL # OF MUNICIPALITIES
SELECTMEN-TOWN MEETING	781 - 27,522	98	100%	0	0%	98	58%
MAYOR-COUNCIL	9,334 - 148,333	6	20%	24	80%	30	18%
COUNCIL-TOWN MANAGER	12,205 - 67,973	18	62%	11	38%	29	17%
SELECTMEN- REP TOWN MEETING	19,553 - 63,514	3	50%	3	50%	6	4%
SELECTMEN-TOWN MANAGER-TOWN	9,066 - 10,953	3	100%	0	0%	3	2%
SELECTMEN-COUNCIL	20,732 - 36,950	1	50%	1	50%	2	1%
SELECTMEN-TOWN MANAGER	24,807	1	100%	0	0%	1	1%
DATA: 11/2022; US CENSUS BUREAU (2020)	TOTALS	130	77%	39	23%	169	100%



Forms of Government Comparison

Connecticut & Nationally

Nationally: U.S. Municipality Forms of Government

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION U.S. MUNICIPALITY FORM OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT SURVEY (2018-2019)	NUMBER	%
COUNCIL/MANAGER	4,386	40.0%
MAYOR/COUNCIL	4,166	38.0%
COMMISSION	1,302	11.9%
TOWN MEETING	1,056	9.6%
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING	59	0.5%
TOTAL	10,969	100%

Data: ICMA - Survey Research: Municipal Form of Government (2018-2019); includes municipalities with at least 2,500 residents (2018 U.S. Census estimate); Form of government classified by ICMA as of 9/2019

Note: The "Commission" form of government is defined as a board of elected commissioners that serve as heads of specific departments, while also collectively serving as the legislative body - this form is the only one shown that is not in use in Connecticut



CT Forms of Municipal Government – *Most Common*

SELECTMEN-TOWN MEETING					
POPULATION RANGE (781 - 27,522)	TOTAL	STATE STATUTE		CHARTER	
781 - 5,000	39	35	90%	4	10%
5,001 - 10,000	31	18	58%	13	42%
10,001 - 20,000	23	3	13%	20	87%
20,001 - 27,522	5	0	0%	5	100%
TOTALS	98	56	57%	42	43%

Most commonly used in Connecticut
Mostly used by towns with lower populations



CT Forms of Municipal Government – *Most Common*

COUNCIL - TOWN MANAGER		
POPULATION RANGE <i>(12,205 - 148,333)</i>	#	%
12,205 - 27,522	18	62%
27,523 - 50,000	8	28%
50,001 - 100,000	3	10%
100,001 - 148,333	0	0%
TOTALS	29	100%

***Professional CEO – Town Manager as Executive Authority
Council as Legislative Body
Town Meeting typically held for some actions***



CT Forms of Municipal Government – *Most Common*

MAYOR - COUNCIL			
POPULATION RANGE <i>(27,523 - 148,333)</i>	#	%	
9,334 - 27,522	7	23%	
27,523 - 50,000	9	30%	77%
50,001 - 100,000	9	30%	
100,001 - 148,333	5	17%	
TOTALS	30	100%	

*Typically used by larger municipalities
 Characterized by “strong” or “weak” Mayor variations*



CT Forms of Municipal Government – Others

Other Charter Forms of Government with a Board of Selectmen

SELECTMEN - REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING					
			LEGISLATIVE BODY: REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING		
MUNICIPALITY	POPULATION RANGE (19,553 - 63,514)	BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEMBERS	REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING MEMBERS	REPRESENTATIVES AS % OF POPULATION	POPULATION PER REPRESENTATIVE
Waterford	19,553	3	25	0.1%	782
Darien	21,500	5	100	0.5%	215
Westport	27,279	5	36	0.1%	758
Branford	28,176	3	30	0.1%	939
Fairfield	61,949	3	40	0.1%	1549
Greenwich	63,514	3	230	0.4%	276

Selectmen – Council (2): New Canaan, Trumbull

Selectmen–Town Manager–Town Meeting (3): Granby, Hebron, Winchester

Selectmen – Town Manager (1): Simsbury



Municipal Officers (*Elected – Appointed*)

OFFICER	ELECTED	APPOINTED <i>No Term</i>	TERM <i>Elected or Appointed</i>
Town Clerk	68%	24%	49%: 4 Years
Tax Collector	44%	42%	29%: 2 Years; 27%: 4 Years
Treasurer	53%	36% (<i>of these 47% Finance Officer designated as Treasurer</i>)	51%: 2 Years



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SUMMARY

MATCHING EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY & LEGISLATIVE BODY

- **In summary, any of the forms of local government can achieve a high level of effectiveness and efficiency**
- **The goal is to match an executive authority with a legislative body that meets the needs of a community and its culture**
- **The operating relationship between the executive authority and the legislative body forms the foundation for effective service and performance - it is about how individuals interact, communicate and collaborate**

SUMMARY

INFORMED LEGISLATIVE BODY FOR DECISION-MAKING

- **The effectiveness of a town's legislative body is dependent on participation and informed decision-making**
- **Towns without a charter rely solely on the Town Meeting for adopting ordinances and the annual town budget**
- **Towns with charters, such as the Council-Town Manager form of government typically have shared legislative authority between their Council and Town Meeting**

SUMMARY

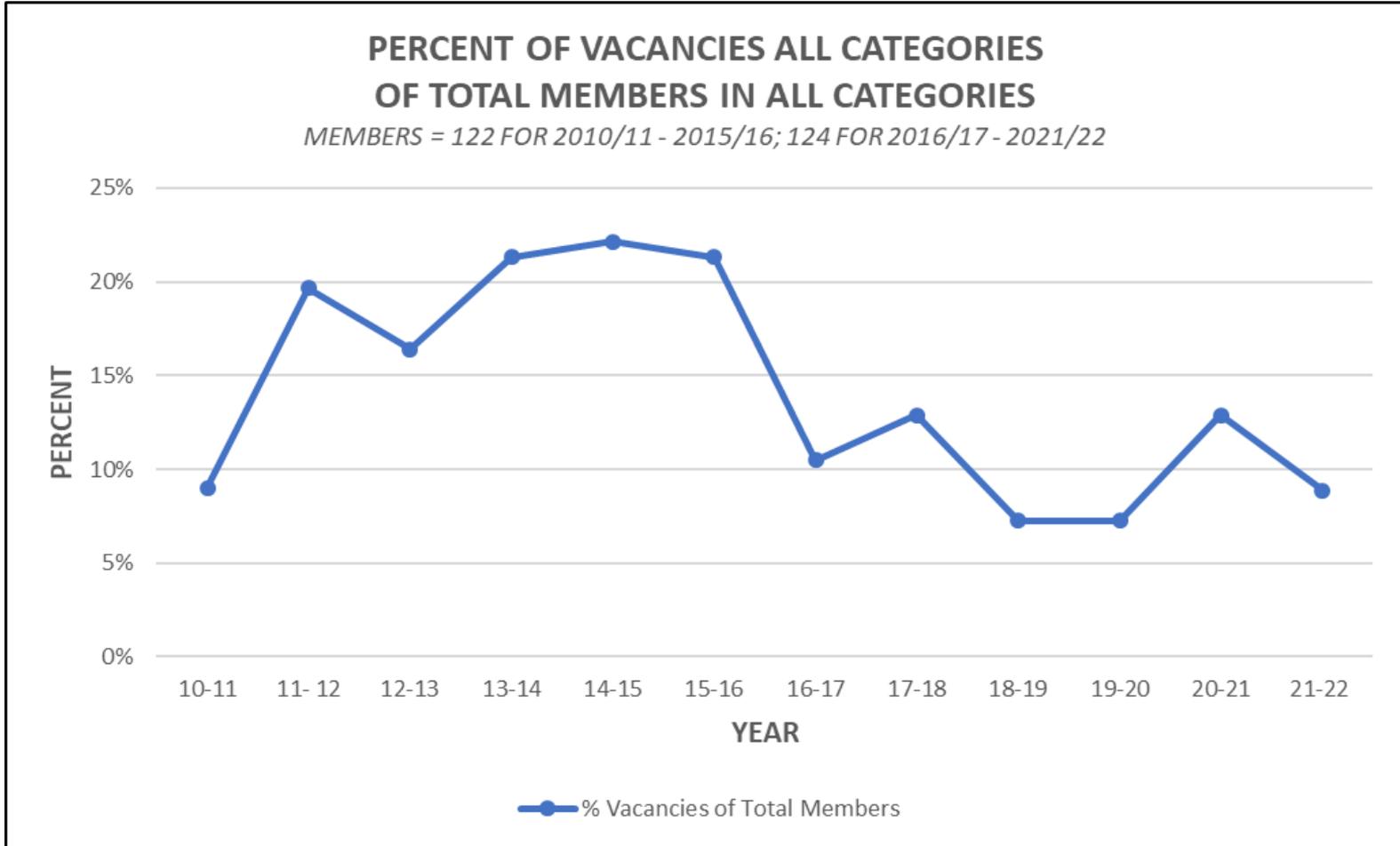
FINDING A BALANCE IN FISCAL AUTHORITY

- **The entity designated as the fiscal authority plays a major role in determining the initiatives, projects, and overall delivery of services provided**
- **Ultimately, regardless of the authority vested in the specific boards, leaders, and staff, the ability for a community to operate efficiently and effectively in delivering services to its residents is reliant on collaboration, communication, and agreement of those involved in the financial policy, administration, and budgeting process**

Town-wide Engagement



Chester Board & Commission Vacancy Review



**For the period 2011 – 2022 vacancy rate ranged from 7% - 22%;
and was 9% as of end of 2022**



Legislative Body Participation Trends 2011 - 2022

In summary, town meeting participation continues to be low

REGION 4 EDUCATION BUDGET REFERENDUMS

- **Average number and % of votes cast were 127 or (5%) of registered voters 2,567**



Chester Resident Participation in Legislation

SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS

- Voter attendance and number of votes cast were generally and are not officially counted and documented. 2 Special Town Meetings held in 2019 were counted, and the participation percentage rate per total # of registered voters = 0.1% - 1.31%

SAMPLE OF SPECIAL & REGULAR BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETINGS

- The number of the audience of citizens was often counted or estimated. Out of 17 analyzed meetings, the audience of citizens were counted as follows: 8 were documented as "None," 7 ranged between 1 - 17 actual or estimated attendees, 1 meeting with "approximately 50" attendees and 1 documented as "No audience member spoke"



Municipal Interviews



How Interviews Selected

- **At least one town for each form of government for towns similar in demographics**
- **Exclude cities & towns with Mayors**
- **Towns in our region**
- **Utilize regional Councils of Government**
- **Targeting total of 12-15 interviews using priority ranking**



Final Interview List

Town	Interview Date	Population <i>(Source: CT DPH, estimates as of 7/21)</i>	Current Form of Government	Charter or Statute	Key Contact
Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)	11/18/22 , Conference Call	Represents 38 municipalities	N/A	N/A	Matt Hart, Executive Director <i>(former West Hartford and Mansfield Town Manager)</i>
Clinton	1/5/23, 1 pm, Chester Town Hall	13,400	Town Manager - Council	Charter	Christine Goupil, final First Selectman
Columbia	12/13/22, 2 pm, Columbia Town Hall	5,246	Selectmen - Town Meeting <i>(with Town Administrator)</i>	Charter	Mark Walter, Town Administrator <i>(former East Haddam First Selectman)</i>
Deep River	12/12/22, 10 am, Deep River Town Hall	4,462	Selectmen -Town Meeting	Statute	Angus McDonald, First Selectman
South Central Region Council of Governments (SCRCOG) &	12/8/22, 12:30 pm, Conference Call	Represents 15 municipalities	N/A	N/A	Laura Francis, Deputy Director SCRCOG <i>(former Durham First Selectman)</i>
Durham		7,231	Selectmen - Town Meeting	Charter	
Essex	12/19/22, 4:30 pm, Centerbrook	6,759	Selectmen - Town Meeting	Statute	Norm Needleman, First Selectman
Hebron	1/4/23, 1 pm, Hebron Town Hall	9,066	Town Manager - Selectmen - Town Meeting	Charter	Andy Tierney, Town Manager
Lower CT River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG)	12/1/22, 2 pm, Essex	Represents 17 municipalities <i>(including Chester)</i>	N/A	N/A	Sam Gold, Executive Director
Marlborough	12/13/22, 3:30 pm, Marlborough Town Hall	6,093	Town Manager - Selectmen	Charter	Amy Traversa, Interim Town Manager <i>(former First Selectman)</i>
Old Lyme	1/3/23, 10 am, Old Lyme Town Hall	7,577	Selectmen - Town Meeting	Statute	Tim Griswold, First Selectman
Old Saybrook	12/16/22, 2 pm, Old Saybrook Town Hall	10,563	Selectmen - Town Meeting	Charter	Carl Fortuna, First Selectman
Portland	1/5/23, 3 pm, Portland Library	9,462	Selectmen - Town Meeting <i>(no Board of Finance)</i>	Charter	Susan Bransfield, former First Selectman
South Windsor &	1/3/23, 2 pm, Zoom	26,767	Town Manager - Council	Charter	Mike Maniscalco, Town Manager & former East Hampton Town Manager
East Hampton		12,874	Town Manager - Council	Charter	
Wilton &	1/19/23, 10 am, Zoom	18,460	Selectmen - Town Meeting <i>(with Town Administrator)</i>	Charter	Matt Knickerbocker, Wilton Town Administrator & former Bethel First Selectman
Bethel		20,537	Selectmen - Town Meeting	Charter	



Interview Content

Form of Government Structure

Complexity

Continuity



How Interviews Conducted

- Interview could be in person (*preferred*), virtual or by phone
- Expected duration = 60 minutes each
- At least two Committee members present
- Document each interview with key findings and information



Potential Next Steps to Address BOS Concerns



Potential Next Steps to Address Complexity of Government

Administrative Initiative

Consider hiring a professional administrator- responsibilities delegated by the Board of Selectmen

- Reports to 3-member Board of Selectmen
- Involves shared executive authority between First Selectman (CEO) and administrator

Change Requiring a Town Charter

Consider hiring a professional Town Manager as CEO – serves as executive authority – responsibilities defined by charter

- Reports to expanded Board of Selectmen or Town Council
- Board of of Selectmen/Town Council serves as legislative body – along with Town Meeting



Potential Next Steps to Address Leadership Continuity

Changes Requiring a Town Charter

- Increase Board of Selectmen beyond 3 members to increase skill sets, diversity of thinking, stagger terms to aid in continuity
- Expanded Board of Selectmen serves as informed legislative body along with the Town Meeting per charter

Changes by Ordinance

- Increase Selectmen term to 4 years
- Appoint Town Clerk, Tax Collector and Treasurer (*Option: by appointment have Finance Manager assume Treasurer responsibilities*)
- Limit elected boards to only those required by statute – all others appointed

Administrative Initiatives

- Designate a grant writer
- Conduct an operational/organizational review of town departments and functions
- Explore multiple job-sharing responsibilities and cross-training
- Consider creating regional pools of administrative professional employees with RiverCOG and area towns



Potential Next Steps to Address Town-wide Engagement

Administrative Initiative

- **Conduct joint meetings with board & commission chairs**
- **Track terms and vacancies of appointed/elected positions to address expiring terms and vacancies**
- **Consider filling appointments to outside (regional) organizations with members of town-related boards or organizations with similar responsibilities**
- **Update board & commission listings – clearly define responsibilities, a contact, and openings**
- **Recognize individuals appointed/elected to boards & commissions**
- **Examine why residents do and don't participate in town government and how to engage them for volunteer service**



SUMMATION

If the Board of Selectmen determines to take action on the options presented in this report, the Committee suggests that the Board should simultaneously:

Explore changes that can be initiated immediately or in the near-term within the statutory framework of Chester's Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government (by administrative action and ordinance), while also considering the creation of a Charter Commission to address those issues that can be solved more specifically or only through adoption of a charter.



SUMMATION

Our hope is that this study's well-researched information will be meaningful and helpful to the Town's leadership and residents in determining the best course of action that will benefit and sustain Chester – now and well into the future.



**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN
TONIGHT'S PRESENTATION**

Chester Governance Study Committee

For additional information go to:

<https://www.chesterct.org/home/governance-study-committee>

