

**Town of Southbury 2024 Charter Revision Commission  
Public Hearing  
September 4, 2024  
Room 205, Southbury Town Hall, 7:00 pm**

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9/10/2024 at 8:40 AM.  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE  
SOUTHURY, CONN.  
*[Signature]*  
TOWN CLERK 1st.

**PRESENT:**

Joe Ruggiero, Chairman  
Jason Van Stone, Vice Chairman  
Joan King  
Richard Lynch  
Tom Marks  
Anne Armeno  
Kathryn Smith  
John Reilly  
Michael Carrington

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Members of the Public

Chairman Joe Ruggiero called the Public Hearing of the Charter Revision Commission to order at 7:00 pm in room 205 of the Southbury Town Hall.

Chairman Joe Ruggiero thanked the public for attending the Public Hearing.

Introduced himself and Vice Chairman Jason Van Stone.

Chairman Joe Ruggiero gave instructions for public comment: turn on microphone, introduce yourself with name and address, five minutes each.

All joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Richard Szanto of 159 Bailey Road, resident for 48 years. Mr. Szanto spoke in favor of the Charter Revision Commission looking into provisions for a Police Commission. He also suggested for the commission to consider individual commissions for police, fire, and ems or a combined commission of Emergency Services. Demand has increased on all the emergency systems in town. A commission would help with budgeting and operational needs. Mr. Szanto spoke about towns of similar size that have independent Police Departments all have police commissions. Mr. Szanto has been a volunteer on the Fire Department for 47 years. The amount of calls has increased from 100 calls to 750 calls a year. Hard to sustain on a volunteer basis and daytime is tough.

Shanna Bertram of 295 Westenhook Terrace. Ms. Bertram, member of previous Charter Revision Commission commended the current Charter Revision Commissioners for the work they are about to undertake. Shanna Bertram would like the commission to consider these four topics section 601 Police Protection needs an overhaul in the Charter, Conservation Commission for the management of town open space and town parks, Volunteer engagement, Town Manager.

Please see attached document.

George Bertram of 295 Westenhook Terrace. Mr. Bertram has a BS in Mechanical Engineering, MBA w/specialty in General Management, inventor on 38 US patents, 50 years experience in various management roles.

Mr. Bertram served on BOS for 6 years and has many years volunteering with the town.

Mr. Bertram Spoke in favor of a Town Manager.

Please see attached document.

Janet Brzezinski of 45 Britiani Road since 1998. Thanked the commission for opportunity to speak. Ms.Brzezinski spoke in favor of keeping Southburys current form of government. In 2008 Southbury benchmarked with other towns regarding our form of government. It was decided Southbury would maintain our current form of government which is, town meetings, a six member Board of Selectmen, including First Selectman, along with full and part time staff, plus an administrator with operational responsibility.

Ms. Brzezinski would like the people running Southbury to live in town as this gives them a vested interest in our town and government. Ms. Brzezinski feels our current form of government best meets this goal.

Cathy DeCarli of Flag Swamp Road spoke about changing the name of Board of Selectman to something gender neutral. Ms. DeCarli would like the BOS to have a 4 year staggered term, so we don't get a completely new board each time we vote. Ms. DeCarli would like to vote for more than 3 selectmen at a time. Ms. DeCarli would like to not be restricted to voting for just 3 selectmen.

Fred Sell of 108 Nod Hill Road has lived in town for 40yrs. Mr. Sell would like the Commission to improve the Town's Multi-year Planning Process. Mr. Sell has been involved with the Strategic Plan Commission for 3 years. He believes Southbury would benefit from a more formalized and transparent long range planning process. Please see attached document.

Ann Westerman of 1063 Main Street North. Ms.Westerman is a Commissioner on Southbury Historic District Commission, she spoke about the consolidation of the two historic districts in Southbury. The two Historic Districts have discussed this topic. Ms. Westerman is bringing topic to the attention of Charter Revision Commission.

Electronic Submissions can be made by email: [charterrevision@southbury-ct.gov](mailto:charterrevision@southbury-ct.gov) and fillable form found at [www.southbury-ct.org/charter-revision-submission](http://www.southbury-ct.org/charter-revision-submission)

Chairman Joe Ruggiero thanked the public for their comments. All the information shared during the Public Hearing will be thoughtfully considered. Jason Van Stone motioned to adjourn, Anne Armeno seconded. The Public Hearing adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully,

Danielle Anglace

Subject to Approval

September 4, 2024

To the members of the Southbury Charter Revision Commission:

As a member of the previous Charter Revision Commission, I commend you for the work you are about to undertake. Tonight, I want to highlight some points I feel you need to examine.

First, **Section 601 Police Protection**, needs to be completely overhauled. With the forming of our new Town Police Dept, the responsibilities of the Chief, the management structure, and budgeting should all be clearly spelled out. All references to the Resident State Trooper and acting Chief of Police should be removed from the language.

Next, there are three items still unresolved from the last Charter which I ask that you add to your deliberations.

On June 3, 2019, our Chairman, Ed Gittness provided the Board of Selectmen with a Charter draft for review. He noted in June and later on August 28, 2019 that the Charter Commission recommended the Selectmen take up these issues or appoint a committee to investigate and make recommendations. Those issues are:

**Conservation Commission for the Management of our Open Space and Town Parks -**

I have few comments regarding this topic. Perhaps in your research you might uncover what other towns of our size do across the state.

We currently rely on our Public Works Dept. to maintain these areas, and they certainly have more pressing infrastructure responsibilities.

**Volunteer Engagement** – I see the Chairman of the DTC and the Vice-Chair of the RTC are on this Commission. This should be a topic you are both familiar with. The members you have tasked with finding volunteers to fill open positions and ballots have an uphill battle. Considering 20 of the 37 town Boards and Commissions currently have vacancies (*see list*), among these there are 6 elected positions. If Southbury is a town that ‘runs on volunteers’, it would seem we are at a precarious point in town governance.

**Town Manager** – This topic comes up every Charter revision as far back as 2008, perhaps beyond.

With the last Charter Commission, we spent hours debating the topic and very nearly added it to the Charter Draft. Ultimately, it was decided to send the topic on to the Board of Selectmen to be studied in more depth.

Twice, the task of consideration and study was sent from the Charter Commission to the Selectmen, once with the Charter Draft and again with the final revisions. However, it wasn't until the Board of Selectmen meeting on March 18, 2021– a full nineteen months later, that the topic was placed on the agenda as New Business, then moved to the April 1, 2021 meeting for discussion.

*(During those 19 months, a survey was performed by the Strategic Plan Committee which showed majority support for the idea among the survey respondents.)*

I would ask this Commission to review the minutes from the April 1, 2021 BoS meeting regarding the Town Manager discussions.

No opposition to the idea was voiced, just the way in which it would be researched and proposed to the townspeople.

Selectman Buchsbaum clearly stated that the town was 'not too far off from opening the Charter again' and it could be looked at by the Charter Commission at that time.

First Selectman Manville felt this should be "investigated during the next Charter Revision" – that's you people!

On November 18, 2021 members of the Strategic Plan Commission presented the Board of Selectmen with their research and findings regarding a Town Manager. I've included their presentation for your review. There has been no further discussion since.

As Commission members, please consider:

- the population/size of our town
- the increasing lack of candidates for our Boards and Commissions
- the employee turnover in the past six or eight years within the town hall
- the increased management workload our Director of Finance has taken on

I ***STRONGLY*** urge this Commission to review the materials I am supplying, and ultimately recommend that the position of Professional Town Manager be added to the Charter.

*Allow this question to come before the voting population at referendum.*

It would benefit Southbury tremendously to have a degreed professional, someone with a Masters in Public Administration or equal, helping to steer the future of our town.

Thank you for your consideration,



# A Town Manager for Southbury?

## For those who don't know me:

- I have a BS in Mechanical Engineering and an MBA with a specialty in General Management
- I'm named Inventor on 38 US Patents
- I obtained my first management position in 1975
- Since then, I've accumulated 50 years of experience in various roles, from Project Manager to company President
- I served on the BoS for six years – volunteering countless hours on many projects
- I recognize good management and well-run operations when I see them
- Historically, Southbury has done well compared to CT towns of similar size
- But we could do better

## So, what can we improve?

- Here's my honest take:
- Southbury is “behind the times” in many respects – we are very slow adopters
- Town Operations are often substandard compared to the Private Sector – and many think that's okay – but why?
- Employee morale is often less than stellar, leading to performance issues and high turnover, even among Department Heads
- We don't utilize contemporary management practices – managing people is a blend of art and science
- New ideas are often rejected without due consideration
- Proactive planning is not our strong suit
- We desperately need more citizen engagement as we can't fill openings on boards and commissions
- Unaffiliated voters are underrepresented in town government

## These issues are exacerbated by a lack of professionalism in town management

- I'm also concerned that leaders on the BoF won't be in their roles much longer – possibly creating a leadership vacuum

## Why can't we hire a competent, experienced professional to run the Town?

- The current system offers a choice between two candidates – one from the RTC and one from the DTC – who both struggle to find qualified folks willing to run
- To make matters worse, compensation for First Selectman isn't competitive with the private sector
- It is difficult, if not impossible, to recruit top talent under the current system
- Note that unaffiliateds are typically frustrated because they feel they are voting for the lesser of two evils

## **To make things better, I propose that we adopt a Town Manager system**

- **And modify the role of the First Selectman accordingly**

### **Is this a Radical Suggestion? – No, not at all**

- **The Town Manager concept was born at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.**
  - It is now the most popular structure of local government in the United States – and it continues to grow
  - The Manager system is the most popular structure among municipalities in the US with populations of 2,500 or more
  - Fifty-four percent of the more than 4,300 municipalities in the US with populations of at least 10,000 are under a manager
  - 59 percent of the 347 municipalities in the US with populations greater than 100,000 have Town Managers
- **And a manager system is used in 41 out of 169 CT municipalities – that's 24%**
  - That percentage grows steadily – with Wilton recently added to the list and Ridgefield now moving to adopt it

### **And the Manager Approach Has Benefits**

- It creates a well-defined separation between town operations and politics.
- Town Employees are held to a higher standard, more akin to what is expected in the private sector
- Employees adapt to the new expectations, become more productive and operations improve
- An IBM report titled “Smarter, Faster, Cheaper” found that cities with managers are ten percent more efficient than those under the mayor-council form.
- Research also indicates home values in municipalities with a manager are higher

### **What does Southbury think?**

- Folks generally like the idea
- In a 2018 town-wide survey, 62.4% of respondents with an opinion favored a Town Manager
- The last Charter Revision Commission officially asked the BoS to consider the Town Manager option

### **In Conclusion**

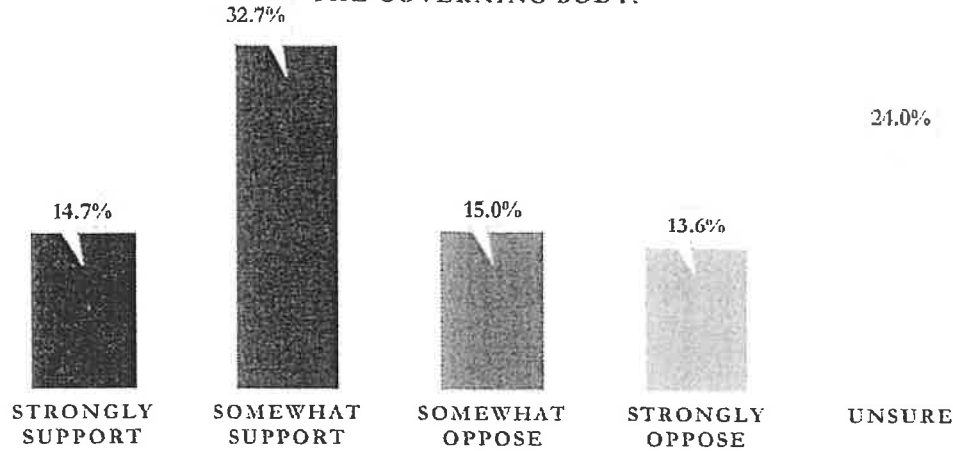
- **We have an excellent opportunity during this Charter Revision Cycle to restructure town governance by adopting a Town Manager**
- **Consider the fact that we hire a professional-grade Superintendent to run our Schools**
  - The Board of Education hires an experienced PhD-level candidate for that job
  - It would be madness to select a Superintendent as we do for a First Selectman
  - Why should the town operate differently?

# Southbury Strategic Plan Commission

## SOUTHBURY RESIDENTS INTEREST IN TOWN MANAGER APPROACH

The 2018 Southbury Community Survey conducted for the Strategic Planning Task Force indicated that nearly half of the 1177 respondents had interest in the Town Manager concept.

HOW STRONGLY WOULD YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE THE HIRING OF A TOWN MANAGER, A CONTRACTUAL EMPLOYEE, ACTING AS THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER REPORTING TO THE GOVERNING BODY?



### NOTE:

Of the 76% that had an opinion,

- 62.4% support
- 37.6% oppose

the hiring of a Town Manager for Southbury.

George Bertram

September 3, 2024

## Input to Charter Review Commission – 9/4/24

Good evening, my name is Fred Sell, I live at 108 Nod Hill Road.

I wish to highlight the need for revisions to the Charter to **improve the Town's multi-year planning process.**

My comments tonight are informed by my involvement with the Strategic Plan Commission over the last three years and having been a resident of Southbury for over 40 years.

I believe our Town needs and would benefit from **a more formalized and transparent long range planning process** that covers the full scope of our Town government's responsibilities. Such a process should cover all vital functions, including Senior and Social Services, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Public Safety, the Library, and government operations.

The Plan of Conservation and Development and the land use planning responsibilities of the Planning Commission do not cover this full scope.

At a minimum, this comprehensive planning process should produce a short list of **prioritized initiatives** that the Town intends **to focus on over the next five years** to address significant **issues** and **opportunities.**

This multi-year plan should be **reviewed and updated annually** in the summer or early fall by the Board of Selectmen, so that it can be considered in establishing the annual Town Budget. This review, prior to annual budgeting, will help ensure that adequate funding is being provided and prudently allocated for the full development and execution of the prioritized multi-year programs.

Over the last few year, various worthwhile "pop-up" muti-year initiatives have surfaced that require significant commitment of Town resources. However, to my knowledge, they were not considered beforehand along with other possible initiatives in a **transparent priority setting process** by our elected Board of Selectmen.

Even though, Section 302 of the current Charter stipulates that the Board of Selectmen is responsible for establishing overall strategy and policy for the Town.

Also, Section 402 of the Charter stipulates in paragraph 5(b) that the First Selectman is responsible for **"Preparing and annually updating a strategic plan for the town subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen"**. I am told this was inserted into the Charter in the 2009 revision. It was not until 2018 that a Town Strategic Plan, developed by an appointed Task Force, was unanimously adopted by the BOS. The BOS has not formally approved an updated plan since then.



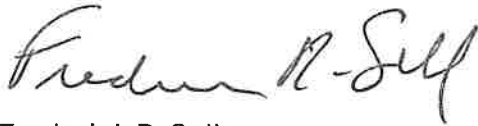
The current Charter in Section 508, paragraph R, provides for a Strategic Plan Commission. This was added in 2019 after approval of the Strategic Plan. For various reasons, **the Strategic Plan Commission has not been utilized** by the Board of Selectman **to facilitate implementation** as expected by the Task Force that recommended its creation.

A review of “Best Practices” places the **responsibility and accountability** for municipal planning on the municipal CEO, in our case the First Selectman, with the duty of engaging the town’s stakeholders to insure **comprehensive input** and **subsequent engagement** in implementation. To be effective, planning **should not be outsourced to a non-elected body** that does not have such stakeholder representation or implementation responsibility.

The current Charter language **has not enabled a visible and effective multi-year planning process** for our Town. If this Charter Commission believes that Southbury citizens deserve and can benefit from a more formal, effective, and transparent **longer range planning process**, then I urge you to consider and **adopt more explicit enabling language** including specific deliverables and due dates.

I will submit on your web page form some suggested language for implementing this change.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frederick R. Sell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Frederick R. Sell

September 4, 2024 - CRC Public Hearing Statement