



CHESTER GOVERNANCE STUDY

Report to the Board of Selectmen

Committee Members

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Presentation to the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

August 4, 2023

Board of Selectmen – Committee Charge & Issues

CHARGE

Identify & analyze alternative governance structures for improving the Town's ability to proactively plan and manage its affairs AND recommend next steps

ISSUES

Complexity

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

Continuity

- Board of Selectmen: All Selectmen planning to not be candidates for re-election & 2-year terms

Engagement

- Finding volunteers to fill vacancies on boards and commissions
- Low town meeting participation



Process

- **Research options to Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government**
- **Interview towns to understand how they have addressed their issues and concerns, including changes to their form of government**
- **Identify potential next steps to address Chester's issues administratively and by charter**



Findings

- **Interviews: confirmed Chester's challenges & issues not unique**
- **Many issues can be addressed administratively and by ordinance without changing our form of government**
- **Addressing overarching issues may require changes only accomplished with a charter**



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



Connecticut Forms of Municipal Government

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

STATE STATUTE (Chester)		
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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%

Connecticut: 169 Cities / Towns

33% - Non-Charter: Selectmen-Town Meeting (56 of 98)

67% - Charter (113)



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



SUMMARY

MATCHING EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY & LEGISLATIVE BODY

- **Any forms of local government can achieve a high level of effectiveness and efficiency**
- **Goal: 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

- Effectiveness is dependent on participation and informed decision-making
- Towns without a charter rely solely on the Town Meeting for adopting ordinances, the annual town budget, and other financial matters
- Towns with charters, typically have shared legislative authority between their Board of Selectmen/Council and the Town Meeting

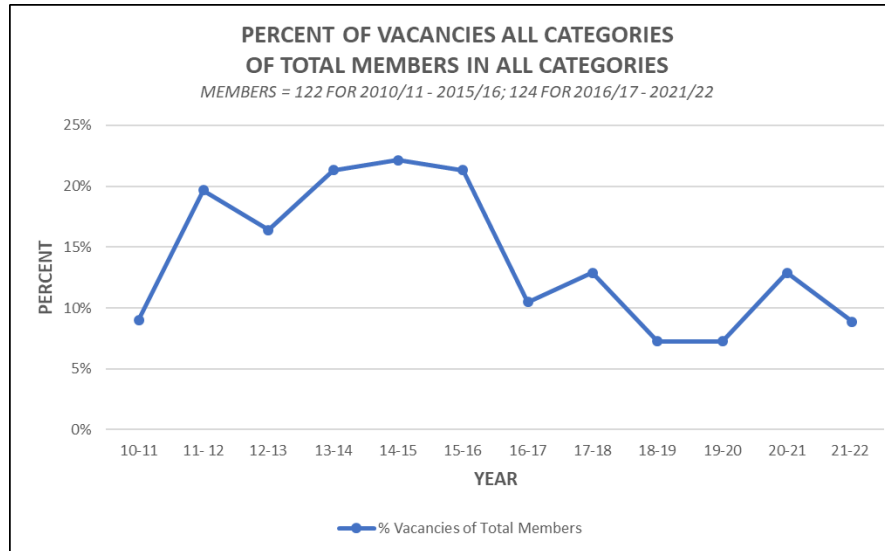
SUMMARY

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: 2011 - 2022

Chester Board & Commission Vacancy Review



Vacancy rate: 7% - 22%; 9% (end of 2022)

Legislative Body Participation Trends

- Town meeting participation continues to be low
- Region 4 Budget Referendums (Chester): 127 = Average number of votes cast - (5%) of registered voters 2,567



Municipal Interviews

Selection

- At least one town for each form of government (*except Mayor-Council*)
- Consider demographics similar to Chester
- Towns in our region
- Utilize regional Councils of Government
- Targeted 12-15 interviews (*14 Interviews Conducted*)

Process

- In-person (*preferred*), virtual or by phone
- Expected duration = 60 minutes
- Conducted by minimum of two Committee members
- Key information/findings documented

Content:

Government Structure, Complexity, Continuity, Engagement



Potential Next Steps: 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: 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 - could be coupled with administrative appointment of a professional manager with delegated authority
- Expanded Board of Selectmen serves as informed legislative body with legislative authority shared 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: 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 it 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; and**
- **Consider creating a Charter Commission to address those issues that can be solved more specifically or only through adopting a charter**

Our hope is that this study 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



ACTION UPDATE

- **Treasurer position moved to “appointed” by Ordinance. Finance Director appointed to position**
- **Charter Resolution Adopted 4/12/23**
- **Charter Commission Nominating Committee appointed by BOS**
- **Charter Commission members appointed by BOS based on Nominating Committee recommendations 5/10/23**
- **Charter Commission organizing meeting 5/31/23**
- **Initial Public Hearing 6/21/23 – sets beginning of substantive work**
- **Governance Study Report review and background meetings with speaker presentations provides foundation for Charter development**
- **14 meetings held as of 8/2/23**
- **Consensus reached on most overarching issues**
- **5 Charter sections drafted**

