

July 14, 2022

Hello Paula and To Whom It May Concern,

After reading the draft charter proposed changes for the Town Of Bethany I want to say that your team did a fine job. For the most part many of the recommended changes were overdue and necessary to bring the charter into alignment with current needs and trends. I'm referring to term limits and the number of members on each committee and board specifically. I still believe that the term suggested are still too long and I question the need for five member teams, why not three? With such a small community as Bethany I suspect that it would be fairly difficult to fill all positions needed but I don't know that for sure. So then the way terms and quantity of members as proposed is at least better than it was so that is a good thing.

There was a statement that I read such that any vacancies within the committees and board will be filled with another member of the same political party. I'm not quite sure if that meant the party affiliation of the person leaving or the first selectman or the majority of the officers of the town. Regardless of that I don't see the need for the same affiliation being a requirement. Why? Because most of the time we want and need the brightest, most capable, willing and compatible person for the position. People need opportunity, equality of sorts, in a small town knowing who you select means more than just being in the same political party. Now if the wording was in a manner that allowed the appointment with the same political party, but not limited to, I think it would work out better in the long run.

My next comment is about the town acquiring land or other real estate in general. Receiving a gifted piece of real estate is one thing, it's fantastic and perhaps it can be very beneficial to the town. It would be developed or public use such as parks or public buildings or it could even be sold off or rented to generate revenues. I don't feel it appropriate for Bethany to be going around buy up properties based on the decision of a certain few. In my opinion we need to reduce taxes and not increase them by spending money that is not readily available, which creates a deficit only to be filled by more taxation. Many times in the past I heard and have felt that the Town Of Bethany was buying up real estate just to stop development. I do not agree with that at all, it's a nice concept but at what cost to the community? In many cases the lack of development is lost tax revenue, increases taxes and the property just becomes open space. Letting the community vote is the best way to go, it's a great idea. Personally I deeply dislike the state highways crisscrossing our town providing excessive vehicle noise and speeding traffic. Stopping development and progress in Bethany does not mean that our neighboring communities will do

the same. That is not been the case with Naugatuck, Prospect, Woodbridge and Cheshire are rapidly growing. What ends up happening is Bethany tries to stay rural by buying land while we pick up huge increases of vehicular traffic thru our town generated by the progress of the towns around us. That is really happening.

My final comment is about some emergency proposal. Being a person who opposes excess government size, overreach and control of the people I am not thrilled to with the intent and wording of the proposal. No where can I find what the charter actually means by emergency or what is the definition of State Of Emergency. I guess it could mean almost anything, which is not good. It could be construed to mean that an emergency could be anything you want it to mean. I know you well enough to believe that you would not use the term loosely or for purposes of gain or against the community. However what about the next person as first selectman after you? The world and this country almost seems like they're going crazy, no need to create an opportunity to make things worse. Also there was this "take necessary action" comment. That in itself is a loaded statement that places near unlimited power on one person. I don't like that either. Just consider what Washington DC, the CDC, and dozens of bureaucratic agencies have done to us in the last two year. It's enough to make anyone cringe and become very cautious. Besides will this power for necessary action dictate a rule of law punishable by a fine or jail time? Holy cow, then how in heck do you enforce such measures? Emergency recommendations are one thing but to take necessary action seems to be a little over the top. It sounds like our civil liberties can be taken away from us. We don't need government to step into every aspect of our live making all decision for us. On the other hand if all this emergency talk is about controlling the town road traffic in certain areas, the town hall hours, school delays, town building usages and such then having the ability to make snap decision may prove beneficial. Specifics are not stated; there need to be a limitation on what decision can be made and how they affect the people when using a state of emergence declaration for necessary action.

I hope you take these comments in a constructive and informative way. Keep up the excellent work you are doing for our Town Of Bethany.

Your Friends,

Joe Bassi III & Patty Bassi

July 20, 2022

TO: The Bethany, CT Town Charter Commission
c/o The First Selectman's Office

RE: PROPOSED CHANGES in Town Organization & Procedures

To begin, I would like to thank the Charter Commission for their your exhaustive work on the proposed Town Charter over these past 18 months. Much time and effort obviously has gone into this process and you should be commended for it. I do have some questions and concerns which I put into writing below, since my husband and I will be out of town and unable to attend the July 21 Hearing in person.

Charter Section:

Ordinances & Resolutions 2.7 & 2.8 – I would like to retain the current requirement that a Town Meeting can be called by the Board of Selectmen or a petition of at least 20 people and not the recommended 50 people proposed. Frankly, gathering 50 citizens may be difficult and a drawback to actually meeting together. I believe 20 people is more realistic and workable.

Vacancies in Elective Offices 3.4. & 3.4f – It is most appropriate for the Board of Selectmen to fill all vacancies until the next election. Although I agree that when a vacancy occurs it would only be fair to try first to fill the job with a member of the same party. I would prefer utilizing a process whereby the vacancy is filled by the most qualified candidate, presumably recommended by a nominations committee until a mutually acceptable replacement is found.

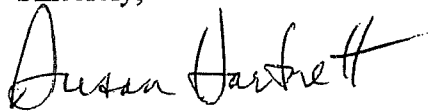
Emergencies 6.4 – The proposal is for the First Selectman to declare a state of emergency, then take action subject to ratification by the Board of Selectmen. I believe that the entire 3-person Board initially should make that declaration, and not merely leave the decision up to one person.

Administrative Officials 7.1 – The way I interpret the proposal in this section is that the Board of Selectmen define who are the Administrative Officials and have the authority to appoint and remove them, but only the First Selectman manages and disciplines these administrative officials. As I read through the titles of defined "officials" as listed on page 19 of the draft Charter, I have to wonder why the Town Attorney, the Town Engineer, and Town Planner are considered "administrative officials." It would seem to me that these three positions are under "contracts" for services rendered and not official administrators. I may be wrong, however, and so I would like to understand the rationale for including them as officials.

Perhaps this is more of a budget issue than one for the Town Charter, but it is disconcerting that when reading the **Bethany 2021-22 Town Budget**, the office of the Town Counsel includes a line item as "Retainer" for \$37,200, plus an additional "Legal Expense" line item for \$25,000. Not to mention that in six other administrative offices, the budget lists "Legals" line items totaling yet another \$16,300. Here again I would like to understand why these legal fees are so substantial. At some time in the future I'd appreciate an explanation.

Again, thank you for all your good work and I'll look forward to learning the outcome of the Charter draft process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Hartnett". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Susan B. Hartnett

27 Woods Road, Bethany

Good morning, Paula--

While I waited for temperatures in the house to go down below 84 degrees, I wrote up some ideas for this charter. When I woke up, I threw most of them out. My own personal comments are small:

1. I'm glad that terms for Board of Finance and Bethany Board of Ed would be made more manageable.
2. I'm glad the BOF has been kept as a 6-member board, rather than making it 5 members.
3. I prefer that Town Meeting (or all eligible voters) keep responsibility for filling an Amity Board of Ed vacancy. Some Charter Commission members have bad memories of one Town Meeting held at BCS. I was only able to attend the two held in Town Hall gym.
 - a. I appreciated the opportunity to hear and talk to the nominees before voting. This will never happen with the appointment process.
 - b. The process could be amended so that nominations and presentations (not debates) are made at Town Meeting, which could then be adjourned to a vote/"machine vote" at a later date (the following week). News or recording of the Town Meeting could be made available for those who could not attend, so they know for whom they are voting.
 - c. Since last spring, we know that more people than those who regularly attend Town Meetings understand the importance of Amity in the budget. Their input on Bethany representation will also be important to them.

I plan to try streaming tonight's hearing. I recommend another hearing be scheduled before the ballot question is due to the Secretary of the State's office. Or you should open another period of written comments before late August. I think what the wider public needs to know is:

1. How does a charter improve town government?
2. How does a charter protect Bethany from state government?
3. How will a charter affect taxes and roads?
4. What's the difference between town officials and town employees and why should I care?

I thought this was going to be shorter than what I wrote last night, but there we are. See you tonight!

Best,--pua

E. Puanani Ford
8 Valley Road

Bradford Buchta
508 Amity Road
Bethany, CT 06524

July 20, 2022

Bethany Board of Selectmen
40 Peck Road
Bethany, CT 06524

Re: Charter Public Hearing 7/21/22

Dear Members of the Bethany Board of Selectmen:

I write to submit comments on behalf of the Bethany Democratic Town Committee ("BDTC") regarding the draft Charter that is subject to the public hearing on July 21, 2022.

The BDTC appreciates the work of all members of the Charter Commission but does not support approval of the Charter in its current form. During a BDTC meeting on July 11, 2022, members present voted unanimously to oppose the Charter. Therefore, the BDTC respectfully requests that the Board of Selectmen vote to reject the Charter.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bradford Buchta', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

BRADFORD BUCHTA
Bethany Democratic Town Committee
Chairperson

Dear members of the Charter Commission:

I have several strong objections about the current proposed charter, and question the idea of our need for a charter at all. The meeting opened by asking for questions from those present. There was no document presented to us, either paper copies, or on a screen.

I expected a presentation on the reasons for each section of the charter, with visuals to refer to. This did not happen.

The make-up of the commission is a concern. Aside from the fact that one party was in the minority, with the makeup of three members of the Republican Party and two members of the Democratic Party. There was no representation of unaffiliated voters. One of the members of the commission serves on the Board of Selectmen, and is proposing changes which would affect the way the Board would operate. Too many functions of government are left to the board, rather than giving residents opportunities to have input to replace elected officials who resign.

In addition, one person at the meeting called for a clear code of ethics, which the town does not currently have. Reference was made to a state statute covering that issue, but why not include that in a charter?

The process was rushed. Meetings were scheduled to the end of this year, but it is now proposed that we vote on the charter in November. Why? The difference in the number of voters needed to pass the charter in a regular election vs. a special town election was explained, and that there are different formulas for declaring whether the charter passes or not. Could this be the reason for rushing to a November vote? Possibly to save money on a special election, or because fewer voters show up to a special election?

This last question brings up the concern of publicity concerning town government. Several people voiced the difficulty of putting information on the town website/facebook page. Why? Democracy can only operate with clarity and transparency.

The funds for technology have been allocated for several months now. Getting information to voters is of prime importance, and there is no reason why this cannot be done more efficiently and easily.

Finally, when I went to upload this letter to the website, there was no link on the town page giving the email address to send it, and no notice that public comments were welcomed, or ended by a certain date. Again, transparency.

How many Bethany residents have any knowledge of this very important change to our town government? This charter was defined as a constitution for our town.

Let's make sure our town understands what it is, why it is, and how it will change the way we govern ourselves.

Although I attended the information meeting, I left with no clear understanding of why a charter for our town is even necessary. The explanation, as I understood it, was that it made it "easier" for the town to initiate certain actions concerning ordinances vs. statutes, with no clear examples of what those actions might be.

Christine Radler
228 Pole Hill Road
Bethany, CT

Constance Royster
4 Fairwood Rd
Bethany, CT 06523

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED CHARTER

1. First, thank the members of the Charter Commission for their many hours of volunteer time.
2. A process that does not provide for full and transparent participation by all members of the community is illegitimate on its face. Where no publicly provided livestream or zoom opportunities were provided to the public to hear, participate, or be heard at meetings of the board of selectmen, the charter commission, the public charter commission meetings then the public has effectively been excluded from the process. The public did not elect the charter commission; they were appointed on a partisan basis as was clearly pointed out at the last public meeting of the charter commission.
3. ADD - In follow-up to the above - Previously requested and not added is a requirement that ALL town meetings and hearings be accessible live either by zoom or some other technology. And backed up by recording. Written minutes are not sufficient. This includes board of selectmen, finance, and most importantly TOWN meetings. Transparency in government should a priority in good governance. Recordings replace concerns voiced by Don Shea about what happens if "zoom doesn't work" on a specific day. Actually, the town should hire a trained technician to conduct such meetings.
4. Section 7 - All terms of employment that previously had specified terms but are now proposed to be changed to indefinite terms, should continue to have specified terms. Constables, Assessor, Tree Warden just to mention a few noticed in Section 7. While Connecticut is an "at will" state, changing to indefinite terms makes it more difficult in reality to terminate the employment of people who are not performing well. Renewal of terms is a better practice. Two-year terms is consistent with the term in office of the selectmen.
5. Section 7.9 Town Attorney - The minimum of two years' experience representing municipalities is too low. It should be 5 years. Would you want a surgeon with 2 years' experience operating on you?
6. ADD - where are the previously requested provisions about conflict of interest, ethics, and nepotism? I don't see. Was that suggestion ignored?
7. What items in this Charter already are covered by our existing Ordinances?
8. What items in this Charter could be covered by Ordinance?



7.21.2022

1. Make Public Hearing publication and notice consistent; page 8

Change Section 2.7 e) – Ordinances Public Hearing to match Section 8.3 e) Budget Hearing

After the first sentence say: Printed copies of the proposed ordinance shall be available at the Office of the Town Clerk at least seven (7) calendar days in advance of said hearing. Notice of the date, time, and location of the public hearing and a copy of the proposed ordinance shall be mailed to all box holders in Town and shall be posted on the Town website at least seven (7) calendar days prior to the hearing.

2. Clarify language; page 11

Section 3.4 a), second paragraph excerpt... "**The political party** of the vacated position may recommend one or more candidates for **the Board** to consider to fill the vacancy." Note "**the Board**" is also used further in that paragraph.

- Question: Does "the political party" mean the Town Committee?
- Question: Does "the Board" mean all the Boards including Selectman, Finance, Education, P & Z, and Zoning Appeals?

3. Clarify language; page 11

Section 3.4 e), in part says... "the vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the **elected Town officers** of the **same party** as the vacated position.

- Question: Does "elected Town officers" mean the Town Committee – or – all the elected Town officials listed in the 12 sections of Section 3?
- Question: Does "same party" indicate same political party?

4. Add Meeting/Hearing Policies, Procedures and Rules by Charter or Ordinance.

I think it would be a good idea to nail down details that include, but are not limited to: town meetings or public hearings are held "in person" excepting emergencies, a town meeting quorum are those electors present, no proxies are permitted, majority vote rules unless otherwise specified by statute, voting is conducted by a call of yea/nay or show of hands, public comment rules should include some limit on how long and how many times persons can speak and if a person is out of order a number of times they should be asked to leave, if Roberts Rules of Order apply it should say it somewhere, say something about how the town meeting minutes get adopted before becoming official.