

Town of Berlin Public Hearing on Charter Revisions

Approved Minutes

Monday, June 20, 2016 – Berlin Elementary School

6:30pm

Attending:

Selectboard Members: Ture Nelson, Pete Kelley, Wayne Lamberton, Brad Towne (arrived 6:55)
Dana Hadley, Town Administrator
Diane Isabelle, Town Treasurer
Corinne Stridsberg, Charter Committee Member
Tim Davis, Road Superintendent
David Delcore, Times Argus
Louise & Frank Mier, Berlin residents
Bob & Judi Wernecke, Berlin residents
William Moore, President, Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce
George Malek, former President, CVCC

Ture Nelson presented the proposed revisions to the Town Charter.
“Red line” copies, along with the four articles to be voted on were distributed.

Article 3 – Bob Wernecke questioned if the selectboard has that authority now. Nelson responded that it’s dogs and pets being added. He stated that the Town Clerk had attended a workshop on Animal Ordinances and advised the selectboard that we need the charter to give us authorization to have fines in regards to animals.

Article 1 – Nelson commented on the extensive list of officers included and changes needing to be made in the charter. Louise Mier questioned if the Administrative Code would be written by the current selectboard members and also approved by them? Nelson responded that it depends on the process. With a vote in August, if the articles pass, it will then go to the Legislature, depending on the speed of that process it may not be until after Town Meeting in March, although Nelson believes the Administrative Code will be mostly written by August. / What impact do voters have for any changes to the Administrative Code? Nelson compared current policies we have. Might be minor tweaks or major rewrites. / Bob Wernecke asked why have the Administrative Code? What will the process be to adopt the Administrative Code? Nelson – Just like other policies, it will be on Selectboard agenda. Corinne Stridsberg mentioned that Rosemary Morse was on the original Charter committee and it had been the intent then to have an Administrative Code.

Bob Wernecke noted there are only four residents in the audience. Corinne Stridsberg mentioned that in addition to the public hearings, there were short videos made by Jeremy Hanson explaining the Charter changes which came out on Front Porch Forum this afternoon.

George Malek believes the Selectboard should have a more elaborate process for the Administrative Code to be changed in the future, to have multiple public hearings (at least two) and a reasonable number of days between them (at least two weeks) to give people enough notice and time to gather others and speak to any proposed changes.

William Moore, president of the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce (CVCC) addressed those present and had his remarks in writing which he shared (see attached). Moore said that out of 300 members in the CVCC, 60 are Berlin businesses. They are opposed to the imposition of a Local Option Sales Tax that they will be drive up the costs for consumers. He questioned what the tax increase would be used for and said it might be expanded in the future by another board to include a tax increase to Rooms and Meals in the future. Consumers have more choices – Amazon and Ebay along with traveling to neighboring states to make purchases. Moore stated that 60% of Berlin residents are renters and unlikely to see a rent decrease as a result. Those who say it's only 1% should be reminded that includes materials purchased for home repairs and construction and major appliances. Businesses having a 1% increase on the cost of energy and added administrative costs will see the costs passed on to consumers. The Town budget becomes more dependent on outside sources.

Brad Towne asked who pays the Local Options Tax, Moore said that it's only collected at businesses in the Town and if being delivered to a Town that collects the Local Options Tax, if they do not, it will not be collected.

George Malek shared that in his years with the CVCC he has been impressed as the Town officials have been very frugal and finds it difficult to envision how the group got comfortable with a Local Options Tax. Half of the money, in round numbers, goes to the state he said, 50% if you include Federal Government. He urges that a hard look be taken if you want to take two dollars from sales and give one dollar to the state.

Bob Wernecke questioned how it would work if he made purchases in another town would he pay? He was told No. He continued, if I ordered online do I pay? Response, only if bought from Berlin business and delivered to Berlin. If bought in West Lebanon? Response – there would be the state use tax but not tax to Berlin. If purchased roofing material at Allen lumber and delivered to Berlin? George Malek believes that yes, the local option tax would be charged.

Louise Mier noted that there seemed to be some confusion on the details of the Local Option Tax and asked that there be clarification at the next Public Hearing on this matter June 27th. 7:22pm – Public Hearing closed, and 5 minute recess before regular Selectboard meeting starts.

Next Public Hearing on Charter Revisions, Monday, June 27th 6:30pm at Berlin Elementary School.

Submitted by
Corinne Stridsberg

6/21/16