

# CITY OF STAMFORD 19<sup>TH</sup> CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

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## MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

7:00pm

*The public hearing was held in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Cafeteria,  
Government Center, 888 Washington Blvd., Stamford, CT  
and remotely*

1. Call to order – Chair Lombardo called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.
2. Roll call. In attendance in person were Chair Lombardo. Vice Chair Larobina; Clerk Pioli; and Comms. Bilicznianski, Bowser, Camporeale, Halpern, Lane, McMullen, and Michelson. In attendance remotely were Comms. Kolenberg, Loeb, Martinez, and Williams. Excused was Comm. Pramberger.
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Public Hearing: Comments on [proposed changes to the City of Stamford Charter](#). The following people spoke at the public hearing: Rev. Winton Hill, Mike Papa, Janis Hill, Lewis Finkel, Laurie Chase, Gabrielle Silver, Theresa Dell, Wendy Kalan, Jacob Griffith-Rosenberger, Chris Fountain; Will Wright, Jennifer Godzeno, Jordan Force, Lloyd Fremed, Becky Hamman, Barry Michelson. James Yaeger, Michael Hyman, Rev. De Andre Bradley, Lisa Feinberg, Jeff Mosenkis, Paula Waldman, David Kooris, Kevin Maguire, Chanta Graham, Paul Arvoy; Laura Burwick, Richard Freedman, Elizabeth Middleton, Zach Oberholtzer, RJ Mercede, and Chris Malloy. Public comments received in writing are attached.
5. Chair Lombardo adjourned the public hearing to order at 8:33 p.m.

This meeting is on [video](#).

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Rosenson, Valerie  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 30, 2023 2:03 PM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Subject:** Fwd: Proposed changes to the Stamford Charter

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**From:** Michael May <mm3214@columbia.edu>  
**Sent:** Saturday, May 27, 2023 7:23:06 PM  
**To:** Board of Representatives <bdreps@StamfordCT.gov>  
**Subject:** Proposed changes to the Stamford Charter

Dear Stamford Board of Representatives,

I live on Washington Boulevard with my wife and daughter. I work as an oncology fellow. I am writing to express my opposition to some of the proposed city charter changes. In particular changes which make it harder to build new developments in Stamford. Stamford is a wonderful and vibrant city, and is tremendously attractive to people moving to the area. However, the rent is very expensive and more development is needed to provide housing, schools and other facilities without pricing out middle and lower income residents. Although the idea of making it easier for landowners to protest and overturn new zoning and development sounds nice, this is at the expense of the many renters in Stamford who will continue to see housing and rental prices rise until the city becomes unaffordable. The city needs to continue to grow and develop to be a prosperous and welcoming place.

I hope you strongly consider omitting any changes to the charter that would make development in Stamford more difficult than it already is.

Sincerely,

Michael

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Rosenson, Valerie  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 30, 2023 9:44 AM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Subject:** Fw: Chapter revision recommendation

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**From:** Paul Arvoy <[ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com](mailto:ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 28, 2023 8:35 AM  
**To:** Charter Revision <[CharterRevision2@StamfordCT.gov](mailto:CharterRevision2@StamfordCT.gov)>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Chapter revision recommendation

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Paul Arvoy <[ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com](mailto:ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com)>  
**Date:** Sun, May 28, 2023 at 8:29 AM  
**Subject:** Chapter revision recommendation  
**To:** Paul Arvoy <[ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com](mailto:ifyouseekstamford@gmail.com)>

I would like to make a comment regarding the "Preamble", titled the Stamford, Ct. code of ordinances, charter ( public hearing version ), the 10th of May 2023, page 1 of 184, number 5 and 6 in red. 5 and 6 are already in the Constitution which most respectable, God fearing Americans follow with a code of morals and values. This is 2023. The misguided text added to the charter in the preamble, in line 5 and 6 are not necessary in the charter when as Americans we live by these standards. If you are not already following these Constitutional standards, you personally need to read 5 and 6 on your own time. Diversity and inclusion starts at home, not in our charter revision. It's frightening that our leaders are sowing division. This needs to be struck from the charter immediately. Diversity and inclusion come from your upbringing not city officials and bureaucrats. The preamble written in 2012 on November 6 is a perfect example of what a preamble should look like professionally while being straight to the point regarding privileges and protections for all Stamford residents. Thank you.

Paul Arvoy  
203 274 3012

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Rosenson, Valerie  
**Sent:** Friday, May 26, 2023 10:50 AM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Subject:** FW: Upcoming charter revision

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**From:** Ann <aehend06@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 26, 2023 10:49:27 AM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)  
**To:** Charter Revision <CharterRevision2@StamfordCT.gov>  
**Subject:** Upcoming charter revision

Hello -

My name is Ann Duffy, and I live in Westover in Stamford. I've been a homeowner for 6 years, and a renter in Stamford for 10 years before that. I love our beautiful city and consider myself very fortunate to have moved here from the Midwest many years ago.

With that said, I have some concerns about the changes that are proposed for Stamford's city charter. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend your meeting on Wednesday night, but I wanted to send you my thoughts as I know you are eager to hear from local citizens.

Overall, I think the goal should be to create a zoning process that is straightforward and transparent, in which we set clear and simple rules that we think are appropriate for housing. Assuming builders play by those rules, they will follow an expedited process. We will do this because we acknowledge that Fairfield County has a housing crisis, and we want Stamford to continue to be a leader in helping to remediate that.

This is why I think new rules like requiring 5+ unit residential developments to pay for costly outreach and studies is a mistake. Or adding additional hurdles like upping the time required for submitting applications to Zoning from 12 months to 24 months. I highly doubt developers take these additional costs on the chin; rather making it more difficult for them to build multifamily housing will just increase costs for new residents, or ensure that it doesn't get built at all.

I don't have a dog in this fight - I don't make my money from development and I am already a homeowner. But I do remember what it felt like, starting out, and I want to allow the kids graduating today that want to live close to their families in Fairfield County to have that opportunity. I think building a place with lots of different kinds of housing, that evolves to meet new needs, is exactly the kind of community we want to be.

With best regards -

Ann Duffy

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Rosenson, Valerie  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 24, 2023 10:29 PM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Subject:** FW: Comments for 5/24 Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing

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**From:** RJ Mercede <rmercede@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 24, 2023 10:28:28 PM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)  
**To:** Board of Representatives <bdreps@StamfordCT.gov>  
**Cc:** Charter Revision <CharterRevision2@StamfordCT.gov>  
**Subject:** Comments for 5/24 Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing

Good evening,

My name is RJ Mercede. I live at 117 Knapp Street. 06907

I want to first thank all members of the Commission for their work going back to March 2022.

Adding to some of the remarks I have heard from concerned speakers tonight, I simply want more clarification on what's being proposed. I found out about tonight's public hearing yesterday and spent two hours last night reviewing the 184-page document. It is clear that a lot of revisions are being proposed, many of which I do not fully understand the ramifications of those changes.

Two quick examples - one minor and one seemingly major: 1) why is Sec. C6-120-3 reducing the square footage for the disposition of park land from 20,000 sq. ft. to 10,000 sq. ft? 2) Why is there so much text change to Part 8 Budgetary Procedures?

I simply do not know enough to approve all changes as proposed, when it is my time to vote. Just listening to other speakers tonight, I am even more concerned.

I also want to note that as of the start of tonight's public hearing, the most recent Charter Revision Commission minutes were from April 12th. According to the city's website, there have been 3 additional meetings since then.

At the end of the day, it is up to the registered voters of Stamford to decide if any proposed revisions to the Charter will be made. I hope that all residents are better informed when it comes time to vote on this matter.

Thank you for listening.

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RJ Mercede

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Rosenson, Valerie  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 24, 2023 7:42 AM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Subject:** Fw: say NO to charter revision changes

In case you didn't get this.

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**From:** Dice Oh <dice@33mm.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 23, 2023 9:27 PM  
**Subject:** say NO to charter revision changes

To Whom It May Concern -

As a Stamford resident I'm writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed changes to the city charter. The proposals appear to have been designed for the sole purpose of empowering and maintaining the wealth of an unrepresentative subset of anti-development landowners who profit from the extreme housing scarcity our region is suffering from. The provisions to add more process and delays to new multifamily housing will worsen the housing shortage, raise rents, and increase the displacement of the working and professional class from this region. The requirement for a 2/3 majority of multiple boards to take any decision of consequence is a recipe for gridlock and a do-nothing government. And allowing 300 landowners in a city of 136,000 (0.2% of the population!) to block upzonings is inequitable and unjust. This is tantamount to rule by the angriest posters on Nextdoor - not something we should aspire to.

Most Stamford residents want a functioning government that's focused on making Stamford more prosperous and affordable by supporting growth in residential and commercial space and growing the tax base. We don't want Stamford to be run by NIMBY homeowners who think having to see a new apartment building is some kind of personal affront.

I urge everyone to vote against these changes.

Thank you  
Dice Oh

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Magalnick, Phillip  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 23, 2023 2:12 PM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila  
**Cc:** PHIL MAGALNICK; Board of Representatives; Hughes, Carmen; Freeman, Janeene; Kazmierczak, Honorata; Michel, David; MATT Blumenthal; Simmons, Caroline; Hubert.delany@cga.ct.gov  
**Subject:** Re: Public Comment, Charter Review Commission

Please note,

I was just informed of several typographical, and perhaps, grammatical, errors in my correspondence. Secondary to blindness are use dictation, and also suffering with a TBI from a concussion, it took three days to put this together, edit, review, and edit. I apologize if anything slip by the Dictation. I hope that the tenor and Contant of my communication is understood. Thank you.

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**From:** pmagalnick@stamfordct.gov <pmagalnick@stamfordct.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 23, 2023 1:33:57 PM  
**To:** Hughes, Sheila <SHughes@StamfordCT.gov>  
**Cc:** PHIL MAGALNICK <philmag@optonline.net>; bdreps@stamfordct.gov <bdreps@stamfordct.gov>; Carmen Hughes <chughes1@stamfordct.gov>; Freeman, Janeene <JFreeman@StamfordCT.gov>; Kazmierczak, Honorata <HKazmierczak@StamfordCT.gov>; Rep. Michel, David <david.michel@cga.ct.gov>; MATT Blumenthal <matt.blumenthal@cga.ct.gov>; csimmons@stamfordct.gov <csimmons@stamfordct.gov>; Hubert.delany@cga.ct.gov <Hubert.delany@cga.ct.gov>  
**Subject:** Public Comment, Charter Review Commission  
Honorable CRC Commissioners and BOR Representatives,

My name is Phillip Allen Magalnick, a 56 year old life-long Stamford resident and current homeowner. before losing my eyesight, I served my city and community for a combined 26 years as a Stamford Police 911 Public Safety Dispatcher and volunteer Firefighter and EMT. My children, now grown, and I attended a mix of public, parochial, and private schools within our city.

Currently, I serve as the Co-Chair of the Stamford ADA Advisory Council, being appointed by Mayor Simmons. I have been serving on this Council since 2013. I have served on the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Committee, and currently serve on both the Visions Zero Community Advisory Committee and the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Strategies Committee for The City Of Stamford. I also served as a member of Mayor Simmons's transition team, specifically tasked with creating a roadmap for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and accessibility within our City. Additionally, I currently serve as the Chairman of the State of Connecticut Rehabilitation Council, for the Department of Aging and Disability Services - Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind. Most recently, I served on a committee with the Mill River Collaborative to review and assist with accessibility within the park and during events. I recently began working with The Ferguson Library to assist them with their desire to become more inclusive, diverse, and accessible to a wider range of patrons. I have held leadership roles with both the Foundation Fighting Blindness and the National Federation of the Blind. Most importantly, I have advocated for the rights of the disabled before many organizations and government agencies, including The City Of Stamford, the Connecticut legislature, and throughout the halls of Congress.

Except for my employment with The City Of Stamford from 1989 through 2009, all of the above activities were, and remain, without monetary compensation.

With the above stated, I would like to address the reason for this communication.

Last week I was advised that the CRC is proposing the formation of a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Disabilities Commission. It is my understanding that some elected and appointed officials are questioning this move, specifically, combining these two vastly different subject, matters and communities. this proposal troubles me as well, and I submit the following with respect to my concerns.

The city already has an ADA Advisory Council, made up of community volunteers, local and state elected officials, representatives from many City departments and the administration. we meet monthly, and through the support of the current administration. We have made great strides towards our charge of increasing and maintaining the City's ADA compliance.

Our counsel has been instrumental with facilitating the creation of accessible ADA compliant restrooms within the Government Center, our parks and beaches, and Terry Connors rink. We placed an accessible beach mat at Cummings Park, and placed accessible tables at our beaches. we have worked tirelessly to ensure safe pedestrian passage when outdoor cafés are using our sidewalks, and are still working to make certain that all city crosswalks are safe, accessible, and ADA compliant with audible pedestrian signals. we've also advocated for safe and accessible bus stops, working with both local and state agencies. We are even engage with Connecticut DOT with respect to inaccessible websites and ticketing kiosks with respect to the new Hartford line train system. Secondary to the work of the council, in 2015, the City completed the 1990 mandated ADA self-assessment of our municipal buildings, parks, and properties. plans are in motion to perform a similarly mandated self assessment of all City sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian rights of ways. with respect to outdoor dining, we are working hard to make certain that the physical barriers are both safe and accessible, and that there is a seat for everyone at the table, regardless of ability. during the pandemic, we encourage the City to find ways of making testing and vaccination sites accessible to those with disabilities who may not have transportation or assistance. Part of making sure that our municipal government is accessible to all citizens, regardless of ability, is ensuring that the ADA mandated effective communications clause is realized and utilized by the City. This means providing information, social media and website content in a format required by a person with a disability, such to include large print, braille, digital, or via a sign language interpreter or closed captioning. recently, the City launched a new website built by Granicus. unfortunately, we learned that the website was not only non-compliant with respect to ADA accessibility, but Granicus was paid for their work, although they did not fulfill their obligations under the contract to make sure that the work was compliant with all local, state, and federal laws. Through third-party testing we learned that with over 3000 uploads of content, flyers, documents, calendars, and images uploaded to the City website, only 7, yes seven, were ADA compliant and accessible! I am blind, and using a screen reader on my iPhone I'm not able to access the majority of the City website, the Contant, or even our own Council page or meeting calendars and recordings. The wheels are in motion to fix this. just prior to the pandemic we advised the BOR Communications Committee that the City's Government Access channel, 79 on Optimum, was discriminatory because it was not accessible to the blind or those who are print disabled. The channel was simply running a silent PowerPoint presentation, but the information was vital to ALL residence of our community as it came from our government. It needed to be accessible. during the pandemic, those such as myself had no clue what information the City was putting out there on either the channel or the website. with respect to Channel 79, we hope that you will check it out. We are pleased to convey that Former Representative Lyon and current Representative Moreson, along with his daughter, have actually narrated these slides for years now, and they are accessible to all! The Council currently has many initiatives in the works, ranging from disability etiquette education for Frontline employees, website and social media accessibility training for those responsible for uploading content, advocating for affordable and accessible housing, encouraging that persons with disabilities are brought into the equation when emergency preparedness planning takes place, n the creation of a policy to permit a resident with a disability to acquire a transferable beach/park parking permit if they do not own a vehicle so that a person of their choosing may take them to the park or beach of their choice. The beach parking permit issue is of personal interest and importance to me. in 2012 i attempted to purchase such a parking permit, but there was no option. more importantly, the City did not have an ADA Coordinator, a position mandated by the 1990 ATA. A recent mile stone, 33 years in the making, was a creation of a 1990 mandated published ADA policy with grievance procedure. For our City.

The ADA Advisory Council is only effective when the community, the government, and other stakeholders work together. There are countless other issues we have addressed, corrected, and are working on. It is our goal to reach every facet of government, from Public Safety, Health and Welfare to Administration to Operations. although there is much work to do, we have celebrated on so many occasions, and we remain encouraged every time we hear "accessibility" or the ATA mentioned during the normal course of business for our municipality.



Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity as a formal phrase or idea is relatively new to me. In my mind, it conjures up equal opportunity, and affirmative action. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was created in past to end discrimination, the only group which it failed to protect from discrimination were those with disabilities. We have learned that DEI often excludes persons with disabilities, and is often hypocritically, not inclusive, diverse, or equitable. I was recently advised by a City Commissioner that attended a training for DEI, but it was ironically not inclusive because many visual portions of the presentation were not described, causing the attendee to feel both disconnected and uninformed.

I hope that some of the examples above shed light on why I strongly feel that DEI should be a separate entity from the ADA or persons with disabilities. This does not, however, mean that I am dismissing DEI. In fact, I feel that it is absolutely necessary for government to be inclusive, diverse, and equitable. Without this aforementioned, DEI, government cannot adequately or thoroughly represent the make up of the community. Calling it what it is propose is harmful. Why not have it called DEI and fill in the blanks?? This seems to more minimalize and marginalize those with disabilities. It separates us, it is not inclusive.

But, one word that is seldom part of the conversation, is the phrase and understanding of accessibility, whether it is physical or not.

In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act attempted to remedy this, but it took until 1990 for the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA, to attempt to repeal our standing as second class citizens simply because we are with a disability. The ADA, although broad, is clear in defining who a person with a disability is, and the protections afforded to the disabled person under the law, whether it be with respect to employment, state, or local government, or a public accommodation.

For the purposes of this communication, as a municipal government, the City of Stamford, under Title IIa of the ADA, is mandated quite simply to provide reasonable accommodations for employment purposes, and reasonable policy or procedural modifications for government access, participation, and communications purposes.

The above is quite important with respect to the topic at hand.

The proposed new commission, combines DEI and disabilities. We know what DEI is, but what is meant by disabilities? The City, as a municipal government, does not provide disability related services. If you can find them, please let me know. The City does, however, have an ADA Coordinator, and a DEI Officer. There are no Disability Services Coordinator, Disability Services or Resource Center. As a blind person, the only disability related services I can find at the Government Center may include only the ability to purchase discounted taxi coupons, a \$45 discount on property taxes, and I believe that the Department of Social Services may have some resources about food or other services, but, our former ADA Coordinator was actually the Director of Social Services, and there was never any mention of these resources.

Quite simply, as stated above, the municipality under the ADA has an obligation to make accommodations in order to make government accessible. Why the use of the word disabilities is included within the Commission which is being proposed is baffling secondary to the mandate of the ADA, and a lack of services being provided by the City. Additionally, having a municipality which is diverse, equitable, and inclusive should, in fact, include persons with disabilities! We should not be an afterthought, an addendum, or excluded from the beginning. We are already often marginalized and minimalized in society, and this taking place in government is both insulting and unreasonable.

Why is not the word ADA part of the equation? I've been told that some within the city government feel that it is a dirty three lettered word. It is of greater insult that a committee of a commission will seek to put into place a body supposedly to address those with disabilities? All of this while not even consulting with or speaking with those with disabilities? This custodial mentality remains pervasive, identified by those without disabilities claiming to know what is best for us. This is simply unconscionable. I submit, there may have been conversations I'm not aware of, but I'm going on what I've learned firsthand.

And why do I make these strong statements above? It is because a standing ADA Advisory Council, meeting, monthly, and known by many, even listed on the municipal website, was never even consulted with respect to this proposed

commission, and how it may affect, positively or negatively, those with disabilities. Leaders of this Council, Frank Mercede, Honorata Kazmierczak, and myself were never contacted by any member of the Charter Revision Commission, although I have been personally informed that some of our names were thrown out there. But, we were never contacted or asked for our opinions and information. If the CRC was seeking to form commissions to address concerns and issues relevant to different groups, centered around religion, ethnicity, or gender identification, I submit that these groups would actually be part of the process. But, because we are disabled, it is often thought that we do not know what is best for ourselves. Did anyone from the CRC committee ask those who live in the disability community what issues or concerns are not being heard, what services are not being met, or if there is actually a need for such representation without the inclusion of disabled persons?

Why do we have separate Police and Fire Commissions? Why do we not just have a Public Safety Commission? I bring up this example because I have been told that. One of the CRC Commissioners stated that there are already too many commissions. Is this why they are combining DEI with disabilities? It just seems like, once again, persons with disabilities, are simply an add-on or second thought. Let's have a DEI commission, but wait, what about people with disabilities? We will just tack them onto the end. This deprives us of not getting the full attention we deserve and are entitled to. By the way, both Honorata Kazmierczak, and myself are Certified Connecticut ADA Coordinators. It is unimaginable that the CRC committee would even want to discuss a Commission with respect to those with disabilities without consulting with us. The Ferguson, the Mill, River, Park, Collaborative, and the DSSD has collaborated with us with respect to the ADA and accessibility. Why the CRC is not taking advantage of our vast knowledge and resources questions to me their motives and intent.

Combining DEI with ADA would be a mistake. Although there is some intersectionality, there is more diversity, then commonality. Merging the two philosophies, communities, and range of concerns would be a disservice to both. Issues will be diluted ever haps. Those with disabilities pushed more into the background. We deserve a seat at the table, up close in the first row, to have our own voice is heard, without having someone speak for us.

Municipality similar to Stamford, New Haven and Norwalk, both have Specific ADA Commissions. In theory, this sounds great, putting some teeth into a committee or counsel. But I have been told by both ADA Coordinators for those cities that our Stamford, ADA Advisory Council is more efficient, effective, and knowledgeable than their Commissions. Period. We are proud of our hard work and dedication to making our City accessible to all. Whether through advocacy, gentle encouragement, or taking a hard stand, we are getting things done! We thank the Administration for this. Lastly, it is quite concerning to read over the proposed Charter changes, especially when going through the other already, standing and proposed commissions. Each of those lists so many details, including who can serve, what their function is, procedures, some policies, etc. When it comes to this DEI and Disabilities Commission, it's just a blank page. The only note I found was that the CRC essentially deferring to the BOR the authority to determine who, what, and how the commission will be dealt. Does this mean that not much thought was given to this? Every other commission is covered, but not this one. It's like the disabled are the proverbial can being kicked down the road. With in my beloved Stamford, right there at 888, I have face discrimination as a person with a disability on more than one occasion. What do I do about it? I attempt to educate and affect change. This makes it better for all who come behind me.

If the CRC would like to discuss Disabilities, the ADA, or accessibility, we respectfully request that the standing ADA Advisory Council be part of the conversation. We remain grateful that the BOR has called upon us many times to discuss issues affecting those with disabilities, and hope that the CRC will do the same.

Speak with us, not about us nor for us. The worst thing you can do for a person with a disability is think that you know what they need, how they can get something done, or even do it for them. We may do things a little differently, but we are capable of speaking for ourselves. Just ask us.

This letter is also endorsed by Honorata Kazmierczak, per her request. It is mentioned here.

Respectfully submitted,

Phillip A. Magalnick,JP  
justice of the Peace  
Co-Chair, City of Stamford, ADA Advisory Council  
203-912-5783  
77 Knox Rd., Stamford, CT 06907

## Hughes, Sheila

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**From:** Angelo Bochanis <angelob1999@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 23, 2023 12:06 PM  
**To:** Charter Revision; Board of Representatives; Rosenson, Valerie; Mayor's Office  
**Subject:** Proposed City Charter revisions

Hello all,

My name is Angelo, I'm a resident of Stamford, and I wanted to write to you all today about the Charter revision process. Ideally, I would have liked to speak at the public meeting on Wednesday, but sadly, information about the meeting was not publicized until very recently, and I cannot attend. I fear this is also preventing other members of the public from making their voices heard on the matter too.

This is a shame, given how consequential the Charter revision process is. I am disappointed that the Commission has not publicly engaged any shareholders so far in the process, and has instead released a 184-page report without any community input. Matters like these are of the utmost importance to the city, and on this front, the Commission's actions are unprofessional, and far short of the standards other City bodies are held to.

I wanted to speak out against the proposed revision for a number of reasons.

First, the proposed changes to the city's planning and zoning processes would add great layers of excessive bureaucracy that will deprive the city of much needed revenue, all while racking up an unquantifiable amount of new expenses. For example, a proposed change would require a two-thirds majority from the Board of Reps, the Planning Board, and the Board of Finance for the city to sell or lease its land (C1-50-3, C6-120-3). This supermajority from three city bodies will be ridiculously hard to attain, and will likely result in more city properties sitting vacant and blighted, instead of earning the city tax revenue and improving the surrounding areas.

Another concerning change being proposed relates to the planning and zoning petitioning process. Currently, it requires signatures of landowners near the site of any proposed change. The Commission has proposed changing the petitioning process to only require the signatures of 300 landowners who live anywhere in the city to submit a petition opposing an amendment (C6-30-7, C6-40-5). This will allow for a very small group of people (~0.02% of Stamford's population) to force more meetings, more back-and-forth, more hurdles, and more votes on any project anywhere in Stamford that they don't like. Ultimately, this process requires a high degree of political know-how, time, energy, command of English language legalese, and money in the form of landownership. It will empower the city's most privileged and politically well-connected, who have all of this, to reshape the city in whatever image they so desire, while leaving out the more than 64,000 people in Stamford who rent. As a renter myself, I ask the Commission why I shouldn't be allowed to have a voice in important projects, but a homeowner who lives on the other side of town can dictate what gets built on my street? An outright comical caveat that the Commission has carved-out is setting the requirement to form a petition to support an amendment to 750 landowners (C6-30-8, C6-40-6). Why has the Commission put forth such an arbitrary standard by requiring 300 landowners to oppose an amendment, but 750 to support one? These changes to the petitioning process will stunt economic development, neuter our ability to tackle the affordable housing crisis, and roll back Stamford's efforts to include marginalized voices in its political process.

However, the most disturbing proposed changes the Commission has put forth relates to the Board of Representatives. The proposed changes would hire a staff attorney for the Board of Representatives (C2-10-3), expand the ability for Representatives to hire outside counsel and incur legal expenses (C2-10-3), give Representatives greater power in filling vacancies (C6-00-3), and make it exponentially harder to discipline Representatives who violate the Code of Ethics of the City (C6-140-8). This is a blatant play to get rid of oversight over the Board of Representatives, and I have to ask: why? Why should it be more difficult for Representatives who violate the Code of Ethics to be disciplined? Why should the

taxpayer suddenly be on the hook for them to hire however many attorneys they want? My neighbors and I are scratching our heads as to why any of these changes would be proposed. These radical proposals reek of suspicion and wrongdoing.

Since much of the Commission's work is being done in the dark, without any public shareholder engagement, I encourage all of you to acquaint yourself with the revisions put forth in their byzantine 184-page redline ([found here](#)) as much as you reasonably can. I implore you to do all in your power to reject these sweeping changes that would deprive the city of much needed tax revenue, drive up costs, increase bureaucracy, disenfranchise renters such as myself, empower tiny mobs of privileged landowners to dictate city processes, and dismantle oversight over the Board of Representatives. I also encourage you to share information about the Commission's happenings to others in the city, since the Commission itself has largely failed to do so, and encourage the Commission to be more transparent with its workings going forward.

Thanks,

Angelo

Theresa Dell

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**Comments on the Draft Charter Revision Recommended by the Charter Revision Commission**

**As related to the Land Use Boards**

Section C1-50-1 Condemnation for municipal purposes.

Section C1-50-3 Acquisition and Disposition of Real Estate.

(PB) Subsection (b) requires community engagement including written notification to BOR rep, posting on City website, and signage at property w/ contact info. Subsection (c) requires joint public hearing.

Comments from PB: Separate public hearings are required as-is, with legal notices being published, neighbors sent notices, agendas and meeting materials available on the City website in advance of the regularly scheduled meetings. Additional notifications would simply cost the city time and money without the assured benefit of increasing participation. Each Board is responsive to different missions (i.e., land use/master plan, finance, etc) and should have their own public hearing. Joint public hearings would make it harder to distinguish the roles and responsibilities of different boards and should not be required by the Charter that establishes separate boards.

Section C6-00-4 Expiration of terms of office. (PB ZB) Alternates shall replace members following the expiration of a term for the purposes of conducting business.

Comments from PB and ZB: Expired terms of appointed board members has been a long-standing issue for the City. Requiring alternates to replace members with expired terms would increase turnover for positions that are already difficult to fill. Thus making a quorum and the passage of any applications difficult to achieve. This could delay time sensitive applications pending re-appointments or new appointments. It is the duty of the Boards as charged by the Charter to consider and approve/deny applications. Such a proposed amendment would hamper a Boards' ability to fulfill the duties outlined in the Charter.

To fix the problem of expired terms, the Planning Board has recommended terms be longer, 4 years, not shorter. Longer terms allow for the Board members to develop and utilize expertise in the subject matter and better participate in the decision process. If a term expires, the party committee has not nominated a replacement and the member has not asked to retire, the Mayor shall be allowed to immediately send that name to BOR for approval for another term. The Planning Board also recommends establishing a mechanism to track when terms expire and have Parties prepare to nominate new members in advance. Further, the new term should start when approved, not starting when the last term ended. Finally, none of the recommendations address diversity on the Boards.

Section C6-30-004. Decision not to be made on same day as close of public hearing. (PB ZB ZBA) Any action shall not be acted upon on the same date as such public hearing.

Comment from PB: Each Board should use their discretion as to whether an application merits acting on the same night as the public hearing or waiting for the next meeting given the Board and members of the public are provided all application materials ahead of the meeting. This is already common practice

and should not be overly codified. It would also cause unnecessary delay for smaller projects (e.g., a homeowner in the coastal area making changes to their home).

Section C6-30-005. Additional requirements for developments of 5 or more residential units. (ZB)

Comment from the ZB: Projects of 5 or more residential units that are permitted as-of-right should not be required to meet additional requirements. If a use is permitted as-of-right, the area has been identified and regulated as a place where such a land use is desirable and appropriate. A single-family home or duplex built as-of-right would not require community engagement. The landowner has the right to develop the property as they see fit in accordance with the City's codes and regulations. While the intent to increase engagement on projects is noble, requiring such on as-of-right developments is an overreach of government regulation. It disproportionately hit non-for profit developers of affordable housing because it adds time and cost to already tight budgets

Section C6-30-6. Applications by City for Amendment to the Master Plan. (PB)

Section C6-40-4(b). Applications by City for Amendments to the Zoning Map. (ZB)

Section C6-40-8(b). Applications for Amendments to the Zoning Regulations. (ZB)

Subsection (b) for those proposed by city agencies, requires neighborhood engagement and outreach.

Comment from PB: OK

Comment from ZB: The Zoning Board is required to notice the public hearing twice, post agendas and materials online, hold a public hearing, and for location specific projects to post signs. Additional notifications would simply cost the city time and money without the assured benefit of increasing participation. Amendments to the Zoning Map are already referred to the relevant member of the Board of Representatives at the time of the filing of the application. Amendments to the Zoning Regulations can be as rudimentary as correcting mistakes, re-organizing, or clarifying policies. It should be the discretion of the ZB as to whether the zoning text change merits additional community engagement in addition to the already-required notifications. It is also not clear why Boards that have defined jurisdictions should have more stringent notification requirements than the BoR that affects many more aspects of Stamford residents.

Section C6-30-7 (PB), Section C6-40-5 (ZB), and Section C6-40-9 (ZB). Referral to BOR by Opponents. Subsections allow any 300 landowners to sign the petition.

Section C6-30-8 (PB) and Section C6-40-6 (ZB). Referral to BOR by Proponents. Subsection (a) allows any 750 landowners to sign the petition.

Comment from PB: Petitions to overturn decisions should be a rarity or extreme measure. The Land Use Boards are established by the Charter to make determinations. The determinations should not be regularly called into question by those with the most time and money to do so. Prior to the BOR accepting to overturn a decision by a Board, the BOR should engage with the Board to understand the

reasoning for the Board's determination. The Planning Board would like an explanation as to why there is a threshold difference between opponents of proposed amendments (lower threshold) and proponents of proposed amendments (higher threshold). It seems like the current set up makes it easier to oppose than support.

Remove part (iii) allowing residents to petition on any application no matter the location. Residents citywide should not be able to sign a petition on an application that is not proximate to their home. Amend (i) to change "owners" to "adult residents." Amend (ii) to state "the adult residents of thirty percent (30%) or more of the land located within one-half of a mile of the borders of such area." Renters and condo owners should be allowed to sign petitions, not just landowners. The Planning Board also recommends clarifying how condo owners are counted in petitions.

In addition, the threshold for petitions is too low. 300 signatures represent 0.2 of Stamford residents. With a low threshold the process is more easily susceptible to manipulation and misinformation.

It should be noted that in most other municipalities have no petition process primarily to have land use decisions be based on land use and not political considerations.

The exclusion of renters, 60 percent of the city's residents, runs counter to the Charter's revised preamble which states that "all residents and visitors to the City of Stamford shall have an equal opportunity to participate fully in the economic, cultural, and intellectual life of the City and to have an equal opportunity to participate in all activities."

Section C6-30-9. Notice of Public Hearing. (PB ZB). Notice shall include the street address of the parcel(s) or zone(s) affected by such proposed amendment and shall provide a clear and concise narrative description of the substance of the proposed amendment.

Comments from PB: OK

Section C6-40-4 (ZB), Section C6-40-8 (ZB), Section C6-40-14. (ZB) Applications for the same amendment may not be considered more than once in a 24-month period.

Comments from PB: Twelve (12) months is sufficient. Greater than 12 months seems overtly punitive. On occasions where an amendment to the regulations contains multiple components, its rejection due to one portion should not unduly hold the reconsideration of the remainder of the amendment in a timely manner. Therefore, the current twelve (12) month time-period is sufficient.

Section. C6-210-3. Powers and Duties

Comments from ZB: The new Housing Commission will be redundant given that the City already has defined housing policy roles assigned to existing Commissions and Boards. A Fair Rent Commission already exists which handle the fair rent issues pursuant to the existing Ordinance. The Planning Board, Zoning Board and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund already effectively implement the City's housing goals and policies through the Master Plan, Zoning Regulations, Housing Affordability Plan and the



Affordable Housing Trust Fund Ordinance. Duplicating the powers and duties of the existing boards will create confusion and impede the execution of the housing policies by the Zoning and Planning Board.

#### Sec. C8-20-1. Public engagement and Initial Multi-Board Public Hearing on Budget Priorities

Comments from PB: As stated before, joint public hearing with the Planning, Finance and Board of Representatives is expected to lead to ambiguity, given each of these boards provide a separate purview to the budget process. Further, having a public hearing on the budget priorities in September is premature given that the boards are yet to receive the proposals from the various departments at this point.

In general, Planning Board would recommend that the Capital Budget process be conducted every two years rather than every year unless otherwise mandated by State Statute. Considerable time is spent in review and approval of the department proposals by various boards and in public hearings leaving limited time between the approval of the budget and the start of the next budget cycle.

#### Remainder of Part 8. Budgetary Procedures (PB)

There are simply too many changes to this process to be understood with such a limited amount of time. What is the intention with these changes? Why are dates and timelines being changed? What is the purpose for combining the operating budget and capital budget processes? The one Planning Board staff member able to advise the Board on these changes has been pouring over the recommended revisions since they were published and still did not have the time or resources to finish the review.

#### Miscellaneous –

-Add language stating that any member of a Board should recuse themselves in instances where they are also members of an outside organization with positions on related matters.

-Should clarify the majority needed for a BOR to approve or reject the Planning Board's decision on a MP amendment or Zoning Board's decision on a ZB application. Currently undefined.

-Did the Charter Revision Commission hold any public outreach? Recommended revisions to Charter would require public outreach by boards on City-initiated projects however no public outreach was done on the charter revision. The Commission did not provide any explanations or reasons for the proposed changes or what the specific goal(s) of these proposed changes is(are).

-Further, the affected boards were not engaged as to what changes they thought were needed or how their boards would be affected by the proposed amendments.

-Many recommendations seem to extend the time between the noticing of a public hearing on an application and a boards determination on an application. The Charter Revision Commission noticed this public hearing once, 1 week in advance. The Land Use Boards are held to greater public notice requirements. The Zoning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals did not have a meeting during this notice

period such that they could discuss the proposed changes. This seems counter to the intent of the proposed Charter revisions.

-The Citywide Boards and Commissions meeting calendar should be regularly updated.

Respectfully,

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Joseph Pigott, Chair, Zoning Board of Appeals