

*Robert J. Bates*

TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS/MICROSOFT "TEAMS"

2021 OCT 22 AM 10:49

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

WORKSHOP

TOWN CLERK  
EAST HARTFORD

OCTOBER 12, 2021

PRESENT Richard Bates, Don Bell, Marcia Leclerc, Angel Santiago, Travis  
in Chambers Simpson and Eric Thompson

PRESENT Deb Arrieta, Shelby Brown and Tom Rup  
via Teams

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bell called the workshop to order at 6:03 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

September 20, 2021 Workshop

MOTION By Marcia Leclerc  
seconded by Tom Rup  
to **approve** the September 20, 2021 Workshop minutes  
Motion carried 9/0.

September 28, 2021 Workshop

MOTION By Rich Bates  
seconded by Travis Simpson  
to **table** the September 28, 2021 Workshop minutes  
Motion carried 9/0.

OPPORTUNITY FOR RESIDENTS TO SPEAK

None

OLD BUSINESS

A. Whether The Town Should Have A Professional Person In Charge Of Overseeing All  
Town Government Operations

The following speakers addressed the Commission:

---

Thea Montanez, Chief Operating Officer, City of Hartford, gave a brief summary of her employment with the City of Hartford.

- Please describe the current form of government in your municipality, and your experience with how it has worked with regard to government efficiency.

Since 2003 and as recommended by a Charter Revision Commission in 2002, Hartford has a strong Mayor form of government.

- How does your role as Chief Operating Officer help make government more efficient

Several of the challenges facing the City of Hartford have solutions that lie within 5 or 6 different departments, not just one area or department. Coordination of the different departments involved in an issue is part of Ms. Montanez's position as COO. Having all parties sit at the table to find a solution to a problem can bring about effective change in an efficient manner.

- Where does accountability lie in a system with a chief operating officer? How are you accountable to the mayor, council, and public?

The Mayor appoints the COO, but the position does require City Council approval. Ms. Montanez believes that she is accountable to both the Mayor and the Council. She meets often with the Mayor and the City Council, attending meetings, providing an annual budget for her office, creates different reports for the City Council, etc.

- Given your role as chief operating officer in a strong mayor form of government, please share your perspective on the most significant strength and weakness of a (mayoral or managed) form of governance for a town with East Hartford's characteristics.

In an urban community, Ms. Montanez feels that having an individual that is a "constant" among the different departments is critical to being able to effectively respond to the needs of the community.

Mayor Leclerc offered her perspective on this issue. At the present time, the Mayor of East Hartford is the one who coordinates with the different department Directors to resolve issues, as well as being a strong presence in the community.

- What are some of the structural and operational challenges that chief operating officers face in their role?

Ms. Montanez explained that, with additional funding from the Mayor, she reorganized the department of Chief Operating Officer from the COO and 2 Executive Assistants to the COO, a Director of Operations, an Operations Manager and 7 Division Heads. This took about 18 months to accomplish, but she felt that it was the only way to effectively manage 13 departments.

- Please describe the managerial relationship with department directors, and describe best practices with how you communicate with your respective council/mayor to ensure accountability.

Ms. Montanez is in constant contact with all Department Directors through all forms of communication, assuring them that her job is remove barriers that are in the way of them doing the things that they do well and that they were hired to do for the City of Hartford. She commented that while everyone has their own management style, accessibility is a key component of her leadership team.

- In your experience or observations, how easy or difficult has it been to identify, recruit, hire, and retain high quality directors and managers? What have you done to make recruitment and retention easier?

Ms. Montanez said the greatest challenge she sees is that little to no effort has been made to foster future leaders from the public sector to work in government. Those people who are leaving government jobs have a lot of institutional knowledge and are not easily replaced with the next generation of workers who are going to follow in their footsteps.

At this point, Ms. Montanez answered questions from the Commissioners.

Mark Boughton, Former Mayor of Danbury, gave a brief summary of his term as Mayor of the City of Danbury, for nearly 20 years.

- Please describe the current form of government in your municipality, and your experience with how it has worked with regard to government efficiency.

The City of Danbury, with a population of approximately 90,000, has a strong Mayor form of government with 21 City Councillors. Mr. Boughton is a believer of a strong Mayor form of government. He stresses that the Charter should be a flexible document in order to make government operate in a most efficient manner.

- Given your role as a former mayor, please share your perspective on the most significant strength and weakness of a (mayoral or managed) form of governance for a town with East Hartford's characteristics.

Mr. Boughton said that one of the drawbacks of a Town Manager/weak Mayor form of government, is that the Mayor – even though voted in by the residents – cannot really make any decisions on their own. He also suggested that hiring a Project Manager is another option to consider. This individual would be in charge of special projects that the community is working on. He/she would be able to get to the root of any problem that may arise and keep things moving.

- What are some of the structural and operational challenges that strong mayors face in their role?

Mr. Boughton stated that operational challenges could be a learning curve for those who have taken office but have little to no experience in managing a large organization. Mr. Boughton also thought that a 4-year term for the Mayor is much better than a 2-year term.

- 
- Last week, we heard from researchers that a "strong" mayor is in reality an "overextended mayor". How did you structure your office to grapple with the challenges of your form of government, and divide your time responding to your council, staff, and constituents?

Mr. Boughton disagrees with the "over-extended" Mayor concept. He does say that the job of being Mayor is difficult, but not impossible.

- Please describe the managerial relationship with department directors, and describe best practices with how you communicated with your council and the public to ensure accountability.

When Mr. Boughton was Mayor, he set up meetings with department heads and used the help of modern technology, i.e. Facebook, out-call, etc. to engage the public.

- In your experience or observations, how easy or difficult has it been to identify, recruit, hire, and retain high quality directors and managers? What have you done to make recruitment and retention easier?

The cost of living in Connecticut is a big hurdle for prospective directors and managers who are new to the area. While the annual salary may be enticing, once the candidate factored in the cost of housing, food, etc., he/she usually could not accept the offer of employment.

- Are there other policy considerations we should be thinking of?

Mr. Boughton emphasized the need for a 4-year term for the office of Mayor and a 4-year term for the Council, as well. He also stated that if this Commission opts for hiring a Chief Operating Officer, that COO should report to the Mayor, who in turn reports to the voters. The last consideration is a good wage for directors, managers and Mayor.

At this point, Mr. Boughton answered questions from the Commissioners.

## ADJOURNMENT

The Commission **adjourned** at 8:35 p.m.