

**Proposal for Consideration
by the Woodbury Charter Revision Commission (CRC)
from Margaret S. Arndt
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Background

Regarding the decision-making process during Charter Revision Commission meetings, most of our discussions have led to proposals to which we could all consent. There are, however, examples (available upon request) when there have been ideas and opinions worthy of consideration but which were not accounted for in creating a proposal to which we could all consent, resulting in majority and minority votes.

Questions:

- Could there have been a better way? Is there a better way?
- Does “voting” not necessarily account for the ideas and opinions of minority voting members?
- Does “voting” potentially disenfranchise minority voting members?

For thoughtful consideration:

Consent-based decision-making

- All decisions are a result of hearing from each person in rounds resulting in a policy or proposal to which each person can consent.
- Objections are welcome to deepen the conversation, account for unintended or negative consequences, and improve a proposal.
- **Consent** can mean “it is good enough for now, safe enough to try; there are no ‘paramount objections’”. It could also include a method of evaluation at a predetermined time. (Note that consent does not necessarily mean full agreement. Instead, it means one can work with a proposal and is willing to move forward.)
- An **objection** (no consent) is often considered a prompt to improve the proposal. It points to something in the proposal that isn’t good enough yet, for example when a new policy would have unintended or negative consequences (including somewhere else) that need to be addressed somehow. It also may be something that is outside one’s preference or range of tolerance, and considered a “deal breaker”.

In the spirit of working productively toward the goals of an organization, if there are objections, the objector is encouraged to provide well-reasoned arguments and all members are encouraged to seek understanding (is it an objection or a preference?; is there concern that a proposal interferes with the overall aim?), and, if needed, amend the proposal (measure the concern [its severity, importance, potential impact], revise the content, strengthen/revise the evaluation criteria, and/or shorten the evaluation term).

Proposal

Allow and encourage Boards, Committees, and Commissions to choose their method of decision-making, for example, by vote and/or by consent.

Proposal Specifics

Re: Section 903, "F. Voting" and "G."

Current wording

"F. Voting. All Members of all boards and commissions, who have not been disqualified shall vote on all matters upon which a vote is held by such board or commission unless there shall be reasonable cause for abstention and said reasonable cause shall be stated and recorded in the minutes of the meeting."

"G. If a vote, on any matter which comes before a board or commission, is postponed until a future meeting of said board or commission ("Postponed Matter"), and if an Alternate Member was seated at the meeting where a vote was postponed on any matter ("Prior Meeting Seated Alternate Member"), then for purposes of voting on the Postponed Matter, the Prior Meeting Seated Alternate Member shall be seated at such future meeting for purposes of voting on the Postponed Matter."

Proposal

In Section 903, "F. Voting", move this section to a newly established F, 1., and replace it with:

"F. Decision-making Process. Boards and Commissions can choose their decision-making process, for example by Voting or by Consenting."

Add F, 1. as follows:

"1. Voting. All Members of all boards and commissions, who have not been disqualified, shall vote on all matters upon which a vote is held by such board or commission unless there shall be reasonable cause for abstention. **Boards and Commissions can choose whether decisions shall be made by a majority vote or a higher percentage vote for each and any item to be decided. A reference for conducting meetings and voting is Robert's Rules of Order.**"

Question:

Do we want to keep after "unless there shall be reasonable cause for abstention": "and said reasonable cause shall be stated and recorded in the minutes of the meeting"?

Add F, 2. as follows:

“2. Consenting. All decisions are a result of hearing from each member in rounds resulting in a policy or proposal to which each member can consent. Objections are welcome to account for unintended or negative consequences, and improve a proposal. Consent can mean ‘it is good enough for now, safe enough to try; there are no paramount objections.’ It could also include a method of evaluation at a predetermined time.”

Change G as follows:

“If a vote or consent-based decision, on any matter which comes before a board or commission, is postponed until a future meeting of said board or commission (“Postponed Matter”), and if an Alternate Member was seated at the meeting where a vote or consent-based decision was postponed on any matter (“Prior Meeting Seated Alternate Member”), then for purposes of voting or consenting on the Postponed Matter, the Prior Meeting Seated Alternate Member shall be seated at such future meeting for purposes of voting or consenting on the Postponed Matter.”

Further Questions:

What of the decision-making process during Town Meetings (Chapter II of the Charter)?

Current wording:

Section 202, B, 1.

“1. In General. Except as otherwise specified herein, all matters submitted to Town Meeting shall be determined by majority vote of those present, eligible to vote and voting.”

Shall Robert’s Rules of Order be specified as the operating method for conducting meetings and voting?

Shall consent-based decision-making be available as an option during Town Meetings?

Precedence

- (1) Article 1, §§ 1, 2, and 14 and Article X, § 2 of the [Connecticut Constitution](#).

Article 1

SEC. 1. *All men when they form a social compact, are equal in rights; and no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community.*

SEC. 2. *All political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit; and they have at all times an undeniable and indefeasible right to alter their form of government in such manner as they may think expedient.*

SEC. 14. *The citizens have a right, in a peaceable manner, to assemble for their common good, and to apply to those invested with the powers of government, for redress of grievances, or other proper purposes, by petition, address or remonstrance.*

https://ballotpedia.org/Article_I_Connecticut_Constitution

Article X, SEC. 2. *The general assembly may prescribe the methods by which towns, cities and boroughs may establish regional governments and the methods by which towns, cities, boroughs and regional governments may enter into compacts. The general assembly shall prescribe the powers, organization, form, and method of dissolution of any government so established.* https://ballotpedia.org/Article_X_Connecticut_Constitution

- (2) Woodbury Charter, Section 101, **Incorporation**

“All the inhabitants dwelling within the territorial limits of the Town of Woodbury, as heretofore constituted, shall continue to be a body politic and corporate under the name of “The Town of Woodbury”, hereinafter called the “Town”, and as such shall have perpetual succession and may hold and exercise all powers and privileges heretofore exercised by the Town and not inconsistent with the provisions of this Charter, the additional powers and privileges herein conferred, and all powers and privileges conferred upon towns under the Constitution and the General Statutes of the State of Connecticut.”

<https://ecode360.com/32095593#32095593>

- (3) The 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence states:

“Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...” <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>