

HOLMDEL CHARTER STUDY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2022
7:00 PM
CONDUCTED ON A VIRTUAL BASIS VIA ZOOM

Call to Order

Open Public Meetings Act Notice

I hereby announce that pursuant to Section 5 of the Open Public Meetings Act that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in the notice, which was sent to the Asbury Park Press, the Two River Times, and posted on the bulletin board in Township Hall and filed in the Township Clerk's Office.

Roll Call

Chairman Kin Gee, Vice Chairman William D. Kastning, Commissioners Janet M. Berk, Gerald Buffalino and C. Zachary Gilstein and Special Council Kevin Starkey were present.

Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Chairman Gee: We will continue with Phase 1 of our plan, which is the study of our current form of government, the township committee. So far, we have had good discussions with four former mayors and one deputy mayor and Holmdel's Township Administrator. On our agenda is former Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso, who also served as the former mayor of Holmdel Township. Unfortunately, I received a text from her that she's not feeling well and has to reschedule. However, we do have two other guests that are here tonight and for the benefit of all invited guests and anyone who's new to our meetings, the format is to ask a series of questions about the township committee form of government. After the response to each question, commissioners will have the opportunity for follow-up questions before we move on to the next question.

Invited guest: Scott Broschart, former Township Committee Member of Hazlet Township and candidate for Red Bank Charter Study Commission

Chairman Gee: Our first guest is Scott Broschart. Scott grew up in Hazlet and became involved in politics in the early 2000s at a young age when he was sued by the township for copyright infringement for using the word Hazlet in a website. The lawsuit never progressed, but I think it did force him to get involved in local politics of the Republican Party as they were then in the minority on the Hazlet township committee. In the three years that he was involved, the committee went from 4-1 Democratic control to 5-0 Republican. His experience in Hazlet politics culminated when he was elected to serve on the township committee in 2005 when he was 25 years old. After serving his term in the township committee, Scott realized he was better served as a political operative and began traveling around the country running congressional races, an attorney general race and working on the Schwarzenegger re-election campaign and McCain's 2008 campaign. Health issues pulled him away from politics and brought him back to New Jersey where he settled in Red Bank to start a family. In his time in Red Bank, he witnessed a one-party rule for almost his entire time there and the constant partisan political banter. This led him to push for non-partisan reform starting in 2018, which ultimately

culminated in the successful passage of a charter study commission, which is also currently underway. He has experienced firsthand the pitfalls of township committee and the borough form of government, as well as partisan politics on a local and national level. Welcome Scott and thank you for being here.

Mr. Broschart: Thank you for that thorough introduction.

Chairman Gee: As you know, we have a series of questions and most of our guests are asked the same question so we can be consistent. The first question is Holmdel operates under the township committee form of local government, what do you think works best in the township committee for local government?

Mr. Broschart: Best is a tough one, I honestly can't really pinpoint one item in a town committee versus borough or versus another Faulkner Act form of government that I've witnessed that is truly a benefit. I've seen nothing but disadvantages in the township committee form of government.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: What could be improved in the way our current township committee form of government works or what do you see as weaknesses?

Mr. Broschart: The biggest weakness is the mayor. As a collective whole, and this is something I experienced working in municipal politics, working on races nationwide, is that politicians fall into a trap where they think people know who they actually are and, especially on a local level, people don't know who you are, they really don't. There's a small minority of people who aggressively know who you are and in a township committee form of government where you have that revolving door of a mayor, it becomes problematic because by the time, whoever the mayor is potentially develops some sort of rapport with the public, more often than not, they're going to be switched out the next year. I know when I was in Hazlet, both Republicans and Democrats had the habit of picking whoever was up for reelection that year as the mayor, so more often than not by the time October or November rolled around, by the time people started to realize who they were potentially they'd be gone in January again. There's a leadership void that truly exists in that township committee form. It becomes impossible almost for the public to really understand who's running their town. Lastly, just the word "committee", you say you're a township committee person to anyone either outside New Jersey or outside of a township committee form of government, they have no clue what the heck that is and that's a big problem. Similar to how if someone who was a freeholder at the time would say they're a freeholder to someone from North Dakota, no one would have the slightest clue what a freeholder is. So, my pitfall of the township committee form of government is, basically, the mayor. It's solely the mayor and the lack of a solid leader. In your town, I think is problematic.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions.

Commissioner Berk: Do you think that there should be a strong mayor; is that what you're saying? Is it a problem that everybody has the same amount of power, except for some formal duties and setting the agenda that the mayor has?

Mr. Broschart: Not necessarily, I wouldn't say a strong mayor, people need someone to hold accountable and in the town committee form where it's the revolving door of a mayor, you can't really hold that mayor accountable because they're going to be gone more likely than not in a

year off of that seat. Whether or not it's a strong mayor or a weak mayor, I know there's different aspects of that with the Faulkner Act, I don't have that answer if that's what you were kind of indirectly asking, but what I do think is that there needs to be a consistent mayor for several years in order to actually move a town forward and to lead a town.

Chairman Gee asked if any other commissions had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: I think we kind of touched upon this a little, but I don't know if Mr. Broschart, wants to add anything more, but the next question is, under the township committee form of government the mayor is elected by members of the township committee at the beginning of the year and serves for a one-year term. The mayor is directly elected by voters in other forms of government. Do you have any thoughts about or comments about the mayor being directly elected?

Mr. Broschart: I'm 100% for it without question. One thing I should kind of, not necessarily walk back, but I will say that the advent of social media has made it easier for mayors in a town committee form of government to put themselves out in front of people. From growing up in Hazlet, I'm still on a Hazlet page and I see my old neighbor who's the mayor there now, or maybe not this year I don't know, she was last year, Tara Clark. I see her putting stuff out as mayor on different Facebook pages, so there is that vessel that is helpful. I still think a directly elected mayor is the way to go.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: Holmdel's township committee consists of five members who are elected at large by the township for a term of three years on a staggered basis. Effectively, this means there's a local election every year. Other forms of local government have one to three years between local elections. Do you have any thoughts or comments on annual local elections?

Mr. Broschart: Elections should not be held every year on a municipal level. Put simply, everyone is always running for office. I'll use Red Bank as an example, every year there's an election and oftentimes we've had party splits. There was a small-time Republicans had council and currently there's two different splits in the Democratic Party. So basically, what you're seeing is someone is running for election every single year and it causes gridlock to happen in municipal government where people get fearful of anything and doing anything that potentially could be beneficial to the town out of fear that it's controversial. One of the things that's always struck me that I've seen time and time again with the municipalities across the country, is that an elected official can do something that's really, really good for the public that 90% of people are going to love, but unfortunately that 10% of people who do not love it are 90% louder than the 90% who actually love it, and over time if you don't kind of corral that it becomes a problem. At the end of the day, elections every year puts the impetus on everyone to just do nothing but campaign and I think it's a gridlock towards progress of the town, especially if you're trying to do something that is not simple day-to-day operations, if be it the hypothetical Bell Works expansion in Holmdel or anything that could potentially be controversial. If you have an election every year, that person or persons who are running are going to be fearful of their vote more so than looking to do the right thing.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions.

Commissioner Gilstein: I don't know how many people you had in the township committee that you were experienced with, but in Holmdel it's only two of the five one year, two the next and then one on the third year and it's a rotation of 2-2-1, so it doesn't seem like everybody's running each year. Do you still think that it drives this gridlock?

Mr. Broschart: Yes, I do. In the township committee, Hazlet had the same breakdown of 2-2-1 it's not as potentially bad, but by the same token though all it takes is one person who's up for re-election to swing a vote. Social media can make a gust of wind be controversial politically, the smallest minutiae, so if there's something that people could waver on that's my issue with it. If you have an election every year, there's someone who's always who's going to be running and for better or for worse, if you're trying to plan something major for the future of the town it can become a hindrance and I've seen it aggressively in Red Bank over the last couple of years, or decade I should say.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone else have any further questions.

Chairman Kastning: How long do you think the term should be?

Mr. Broschart: I think every other year. I think three years is too many. I think every other year is appropriate. I don't know what Aberdeen does, but I feel like there's years where I feel like there's seven people running which also is not healthy, seven people running on a slate. I feel like there might be five people running on a slate, but I don't think that's a healthy amount either.

Commissioner Gilstein: Are you saying people should have a four-year term and half the people run these two years and then two years later the other half are running?

Mr. Broschart: No, in Faulkner, if I recall correctly, let's say you were to look at a town council form, you can stagger that out as either five or seven council members or I think potentially more, I'm not 100% sure, but if you stagger it out every other year where you'll have either two or three running on three-year terms.

Chairman Gee: We're trying to study the current form of government, which is township committee and then we have what we call Phase Two which then looks at the different alternatives and from there will be diving into the various options. Aberdeen happened to be one that I think is a council with the mayor being directly elected and I believe they are a 4-year term, that's why even on a staggered basis there's at least one year in between and others who maybe are on a concurrent term would have three years in between, but we're probably jumping a little bit ahead.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: The next question is, statutorily the township committee is limited to three or five members. Do you have any thoughts or comment about increasing or decreasing the number of members? I think you touched upon this a little bit, where I think you said that one member seems to have potentially maybe outweighed his vote depending on whether he or she may be in an election year. Was that what I was hearing?

Mr. Broschart: Yes, if you have five, elections every year are difficult. In a town your size, you guys are fifteen thousand?

Chairman Gee: We're probably closer to eighteen now.

Mr. Broschart: Five is probably a good number, that's not a scientific answer whatsoever, that's just a gut feeling, but I don't think going higher than five or lower is wise.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: Elections under the township committee form of government are held on a partisan basis. This means that we have two local elections every year – a primary in June and a general election in November. Other forms of local government allow for council members to be elected on a non-partisan basis. Do you have any thoughts or comments on local elections held on a non-partisan basis, such as is done for the Board of Education?

Mr. Broschart: I don't want to go into it too in depth, but at the end of the day I believe it was Mayor LaGuardia of New York who said it best, there's no Republican or Democratic way to pick up the garbage, it's as simple as that, and on a municipal level, I don't believe in partisan politics. I think it creates a situation where people are just against something for no reason whatsoever. The first thing with partisan politics on a municipal level is that it decreases the talent pool of people who can run for office because, at the end of the day, someone who's running for office has to kiss the proverbial ring of either the Republican or Democratic chair in that town in order to run and by doing so they will now have to align themselves with that party on state and county level, which a lot of times people are not comfortable doing. I know for me personally, I got tired of partisan politics and I've been asked to run repeatedly in Red Bank and I refuse to do it because I'm a center-right moderate. I don't consider myself a Republican, I consider myself part of the radical middle and there's no real place for me in either party. So, by eliminating the partisan tags you will raise the talent level because you'll have more people who either don't want to declare themselves to an individual party because they're not all believing and they're not drinking the Kool-Aid of the Republican/Democratic party or by the same token, there's also people who legally are not allowed to run in a partisan election due to their job. I've encountered people before who have conflicts and physically cannot declare themselves as a Republican or Democrat and these are people who are extremely smart who would make a good committee person, commissioner, mayor or whatever else, but are limited in running. So that's kind of the first real aspect of why I think nonpartisan is right for towns. What I've witnessed in Hazlet, what I've witnessed in Red Bank is just annoying. When I was on the committee in Hazlet, we approved the new borough hall and every Democrat in Hazlet was against it for no reason other than it was Republicans pushing it. It was something that was needed, we had no borough hall, and we had basically stolen the senior center from the seniors and operated in a terrible form of borough hall, which is no way to represent your town. In Red Bank, I've witnessed it time and time again. Republicans took control of Red Bank for two years and tried to push a parking deck in Red Bank behind Dublin House. Democrats were up in arms, all against it, was the worst thing in America, meanwhile Democrats get control back again and the second they get control they push for a massive 210 apartment building complex. This is the same group of people who, a year prior, were saying we don't want to turn Red Bank into Hoboken or Jersey City, we don't want these massive buildings, then all of a sudden, they get control and we're going to approve this 210-apartment building, it's just nonsense. I think at the end of the day you can have people who align themselves with issues, and I think that's an important thing in municipal politics, because issues are what drive everything and people don't realize how much. In theory, people should be caring more about their school board elections, because that's where the bulk of their taxes go, but people don't realize that it's not a Republican or Democrat who are working on issues of trying to fix things. It's groups of people

and their ideas, and unfortunately in partisan politics those people get aligned together for whatever reason and oftentimes it's nonsense.

Chairman Gee: You mentioned about kissing the ring, you're a campaign operative so you're on the inside, but I think for a lot of people who are not familiar with that process. Could you briefly describe what you mean? We're going to go into this in greater detail with the next speaker, but maybe for your purpose from your perspective, what do you mean by that.

Mr. Broschart: It's a jacked-up process with fraud, let's put that bluntly. The county committee are elected for each voting district. It used to be a male and a female from each district. I believe some lawsuit happened so it could be two and it doesn't have to be male and female anymore, it just has to be two members of a party in each district. How many voting districts do you guys have in Holmdel?

Chairman Gee: We have ten.

Mr. Broschart: Each party would have 20 county committee members based on two in each district. The party chair is the person who tells the county party who he wants to be on the line for that county committee. You have a system in which the county chair tells a county party who he wants in those seats. The county committee people then in turn vote for who gets to be the chair. Obviously, if I was chairman of a political party, I would put in people I knew who were loyal to me and would vote for me, and then also at the same token I would also put people in who I know would be loyal and would vote for the candidate that I wanted if we had multiple candidates running for office. In essence, what you have is a system where one person, if he's well organized and a good political leader or operative, can essentially control the nominating process for an entire party and when you live in a town like Red Bank that 23 out of the last 25 years has been controlled by one party, you essentially have one person controlling who every single elected official is and obviously, that person is going to do their best to put their people in. When I say you have to kiss the ring, you basically have to suck up to that party chair and prove to that party chair that you're someone who will be loyal.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions.

Commissioner Kastning: What role does the head of the county party, whether it be Democratic or Republican, play?

Mr. Broschart: The head of the county party is also running constantly for re-election. The people who vote for him to run for re-election are the county committee. Obviously, if he has someone in there who supports him and vice versa, he or she is going to put those people in those seats. In this situation, the people who are in the county committee seats who would receive a list from whoever the chair was and municipal chair would make the recommendation to put it on the line, but then the county chair of the party could opt not to do that. It's extremely rare that happens; I believe that may have happened in the Republican Party in your town, I'm not 100% sure. I know there's been some back-and-forth stuff there, I'm not too sure on that, but almost always the county party chairman wants to do what the municipal party chairman does because he doesn't want to ruffle feathers because if he ruffles feathers, he potentially loses votes for his own re-election.

Commissioner Buffalino: Does the county chair have to be an elected official?

Mr. Broschart: The county party chair can be anyone. The Republican chair, right now, is Shaun Golden, who's the sheriff as well, Democratic Senator Gopal wasn't a senator when he first was municipal chair, Vic Scudieri before that was not an elected official, Republican Fred Niemann was not one and Adam Pohark was not one.

Commissioner Buffalino: In your view it wouldn't matter whether they were or not. The fact that they're choosing people to be on this committee by virtue of them supporting them for re-election was the issue I was trying to figure out as to whether how important that is and whether it would be better if they weren't an elected official.

Mr. Broschart: When I say reelection, I don't mean general broad reelection where voters are going to the polls. What I mean is re-election where all the county committee people within Monmouth County would get together and vote on who would be the chairman and not necessarily a November election for something, but it's essentially all the county committee people getting together to vote and elect either who would be the chairman, who would run for state senate, who would run for the county seats, things along those lines.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: Members of the township committee form of government are elected on an at-large basis. Do you think citizens of township would be better represented if we elect some or all of the members of the committee by wards? That is, subsections in the township.

Mr. Broschart: I think for a town like Holmdel, at large is best. When we were kicking around different forms of government, when we were trying to petition the direct to the ballot nonpartisan election in Red Bank, one of the things that we kicked around were wards and there's pluses and minuses to it. I think in small town politics it's probably not needed. In a township like Holmdel where there's really not that much, and obviously, there's differences across the town, but it's not a massive sprawling town with different regions. It's probably not needed. The only town I could think of locally that could, and it used to work, potentially benefit would be a town like Middletown because I think there's enough geographic influence relative to Lincroft versus Leonardo. I think there's enough potential difference there between some of the smaller neighborhoods where they would want representation, but again that's me as an outsider looking in, I really don't know the inner workings of their town too well.

Chairman Gee: I can probably tell you that I know that a number of Middletown folks kind of refer to the other sides. There are differences.

Mr. Broschart: The wet side and the dry side.

Chairman Gee: Exactly, and plus they have a bigger population.

Mr. Broschart: Going back to Holmdel, I don't think it's really needed. You have the smallest sliver north of 35 and everything south. There's only a couple of neighborhoods that are truly different in Holmdel and that's all almost quasi-built dependent on when the homes are built. You have the neighborhood across from Hazlet, where I grew up, right across from the old Hazlet pharmacy, Old Manor. You have a lot of the town homes and condominiums, but then collectively after that, you have a lot of larger estate type homes or farmland type homes that are more kind of in line with each other, so I don't think wards would be beneficial.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: With the exception of a bond ordinance and other minor exceptions, the township committee form of local government does not provide for initiative or referendum by petition from township citizens. Do you have any thoughts or comments on this?

Mr. Broschart: It's a double-edged sword, obviously, I think you give power to people to put different things on a ballot, which can be truly beneficial, and I think in a small town it would be beneficial. The counter to that is you look at a state like California, which any kind of ballot referendum basically just gets backed by a millionaire or a billionaire and they get what they want on the ballot and hopefully for them voted yes on. So, it's a double edge sword, I think you do give more power to the people, but by the same token is that something that you want. I can't truly answer that in an affirmative or negative either way, my gut is that it's more of a positive on a small town level because you're not going to have that mega donor influence like you would in that state level.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: If you can make any changes to the form of government what would they be and why?

Mr. Broschart: It's very open-ended that question and I think I touched on it before. I think the biggest change for government is having a directly elected mayor who could be held accountable for anything. People want to know on Saturday morning, why is my road not getting plowed, well guess what Mayor so and so you're the one to pay. People want to have that person and hopefully you get the right person in that position who can be held accountable, so to me that's the biggest change. The second biggest change are those elections every year and I know I've touched on them pretty aggressively so far. Those are my two main things that I really see as a positive. One of the other things is obviously non-partisan, it is important in my opinion, but the one of the big critiques of nonpartisan is money, is money coming in, the amount of money being spent on those elections. Anyone can go back and look at Long Branch's last mayoral election, I forget what the number was, but it was staggering. It was probably more than Holmdel has spent on municipal elections in the last decade was spent on that mayoral election in Long Branch. One of the pullbacks of that, I didn't touch on this before, is that having elections every other year is a method to kind of negate some of the money that comes in annually, where if you have an election every year there's constant influx of money. Pulling it out every year will squash that a little bit, so you do not have as much direct monetary influence on a yearly basis coming in on an election.

Commissioner Gilstein: I am trying to follow the association of Long Branch and nonpartisan to how that drove more money being spent. Is it because there were more candidates so everybody is spending money?

Mr. Broschart: No, you had two main candidates and I honestly don't know why there was so much money dumped into it. It could just be the fact that Long Branch is Long Branch and if you drive down Ocean Avenue and you'll see the amount of construction going on. One of the biggest gripes about non-partisan, from what I've heard in talking to people, is that the amount of money that comes in is much higher because you're pulling in a much larger spectrum of people to donate to you. You're not just pulling in the same people from the Republican Party or the Democratic Party and one of the things I just wanted to touch on was the counter to that is spacing those elections out every two years.

Commissioner Gilstein: I'm just trying to understand this, so it's because people are not running on a partisan basis so somebody could have some particular interest and get a lot of money behind them and they say I'm going to run for mayor and they can run because they don't have to kiss anybody's ring to get on the ballot, they just have to go get 500 or a thousand signatures and then they're on the ballot and then they got the big money behind them and other people could do the same and that's why there's a lot of money that ends up getting spent. Is that the scenario?

Mr. Broschart: In essence, yes, so let's say I was hypothetically to run as a Republican, I would pull from a Republican donor base. If I'm running as a nonpartisan, I don't have just one donor base to run from. Let's say I'm running in non-partisan slate, I have Republican leanings, you have Democratic leanings, so and so has Republicans, go down the line the money pool opens up much wider.

Commissioner Buffalino: I wouldn't necessarily say that's a bad thing unless you think the money is bringing influence to the candidate on a pay-to-play basis. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Broschart: Well, let's be honest, money's always going to influence pay-to-play. I mean, find one engineer who hasn't donated to a campaign, one that's been appointed. You can't.

Commissioner Buffalino: What you're saying is it potentially could be worse on a non-partisan basis.

Mr. Broschart: Yes, it potentially can be worse, but the counter to that in a sense is that it does get spread out over two years, so just something to kick the tires on a little bit with that.

Chairman Gee: Do you think Long Branch is the norm versus the exception? For example, I don't know if Tinton Falls is another one that's on a non-partisan basis, I have not heard anything about that as kind of attracting a lot of money that works, and so I'm just curious whether that is anecdotal, usually those numbers they jump out at you and I just don't know whether that's an exception or the norm.

Mr. Broschart: I think it's a little anecdotal and I probably shouldn't have brought it into the mix without you know having a true baseline to stand on. It probably is anecdotal because in essence you have a situation like I said before with development in Long Branch that's unrivaled to anything else in Monmouth County. Obviously, development brings in a lot of money.

Chairman Gee: Again, I'm not trying to criticize, I am just curious if that's something that would act as an outline.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions.

Commissioner Kastning: I'd like to go back to the question number nine, which is the referendum. Do you think in Red Bank if a referendum couldn't be initiated by the electorate, the governing body would have ever initiated one on their own?

Mr. Broschart: That's a great question and I can't answer it in the affirmative or negative either way. I'm not trying to take credit for getting this moving, but at the end of the day we stirred the pot, we got the conversation started pushing for non-partisan reform and when we were doing that initially our concern was that we could potentially get enough signatures or close to it and they can catch wind and push for a charter study. That obviously didn't happen at the time and the only reason why the charter study happened is because we basically have a tyrannical party

chair on one of the parties in Red Bank who is hell-bent on imploding every elected official who doesn't agree with him. That's the only reason why and thankfully there were enough elected officials who disagreed with this party chair to push the charter study commission forward.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions.

Commissioner Berk: I just want to make sure I completely understand, you would like a mayor that is accountable, but equal power is fine, he doesn't have to have or she doesn't have to have veto power.

Mr. Broschart: Well let's say hypothetically you decide to go council/mayor form of government and Faulkner, council/mayor is a strong mayor that allows the kind of council to have veto power and back and forth, and so one of the things that you saw in Tinton Falls when the mayor there was first elected he was kind of off on an island and he wanted to put in someone to be either an engineer or an attorney, I forget what the role was, and the other people who were on the town council essentially vetoed him and pulled that back. So, they essentially vetoed him and they wound up coming to a compromise eventually, but in essence there is power to allow for in the strong mayor form for the council to veto certain things if they feel it's not in the best interest.

Commissioner Berk: Your concern is that there should be somebody that people know that they can go to with problems who has a leadership position but not necessarily any more power.

Mr. Broschart: They need to have some power. Red Bank currently has a weak mayor, very nice gentleman, unfortunately he runs meetings and he's a tiebreaker and he gets to appoint a couple of people to commissions and that's the extent of his power. That's not accountability, in my opinion, that's not a strong mayor, that's a figurehead. Now, while a figurehead is nice, given the sense of what I was saying before relative to the township committee form of government where a figurehead doesn't really exist, you want more than that, either with a stronger mayor or a mayor/council form or mayor/administrator, but you need some semblance of power, I believe, behind the mayor.

Chairman Gee: Let's just say hypothetically you have a very strong individual, who's on the council, but he was also a local chair and it sounds like that has a very strong influence. Under the kind of example you used, if that individual was in fact directly elected as mayor and in fact has all the executive powers, under that kind of scenario, does that sound like a scenario that may not be the best for the residents, as he's doing the tenure of that term?

Mr. Broschart: Yes, it's certainly not the most desired effect, if you're pulling executive power a stronger mayor, that's a conversation for later on, with what you guys decide, but yes, it's potentially a problem and it's potentially a problem in any situation. If you get a council person who's elected president, in Faulkner I believe the council president runs the meetings, so if you have a cancerous council president it's no different than having a stronger mayor. I mean the mayor obviously has more clout, but you're still going to have a bad elected official.

Chairman Gee: There's a difference, but you're right we're jumping ahead, so let's wait until we get educated about that, but I do see a difference there.

Chairman Gee asked if anyone had any further questions. There were no other questions.

Chairman Gee: This has been great and you've been really helpful.

Mr. Broschart: I hope I've been helpful and again, I tried to just give you as much as I've experienced in a couple of different towns and across the country so, I wish you guys success. I'm the only person here who ran for charter study and lost by 23 votes, but people who are doing charter study in Red Bank I have confidence that they'll come up with a good solution for our town just as you guys will for Holmdel. So, I wish you guys the best in the process and stay firm to what you guys believe in and looking forward to seeing what you guys put out.

Invited guest: Barbara Singer, Chairwoman of the Holmdel Democratic County Committee

Chairman Gee: In our prior meetings, we have had discussions and touch upon the topic of the local municipal committee called the county committee, and even with the previous speaker he talked about the county committee. I almost don't like the term because I think it's a misnomer because it's really a local municipal committee. What we did was we extended invitations to the chair of the Holmdel Republican County Committee and the Holmdel Democratic County Committee to come before the commission so that we can learn more about the county committee, the role, how it impacts candidates getting elected to serve on the township committee. Only Barbara Singer, chair of the Holmdel Democratic County Committee, has accepted our invitation. Because she is here in her role as the chair of the county committee and not as a former elected official of the township committee, the questions that we're going to ask of her will be different than what we just asked of Mr., Broschart and the other elected officials.

Commissioner Buffalino: Ms. Singer has been a practicing attorney for many years, having received her juris doctor at Brooklyn Law School in 1995 and was admitted to the bar in both New York and New Jersey. As Chairman Gee just outlined, she is currently the chair of the Democratic County Committee, but she has a history of being involved in local politics for a long time as well. Prior to that, she did run for election to the township committee in Holmdel both in 2016 and 2017 and also the state assembly in 2019. She has a history of civic participation as well. She's a member of Charge, which is a nonpartisan resident watchdog group that follows the local utility operating in our town. She's also held positions with the schools, being president of the Holmdel High School PTA. Ms. Singer, is there anything else you want to add that I may not have brought out?

Ms. Singer: No, that's sufficient on my background. A lot of community involvement.

Commissioner Buffalino: As Chairman Gee mentioned we do have a few different questions to ask you as chair of the Democratic County Committee. The first one is, if you can, explain what exactly is the local county committee.

Ms. Singer: I'm going to go with the suggestion to, for our purposes, calling it the municipal committee so as we are further in the discussion when we bring in aspects of Monmouth County, we have a way to distinguish these. As Mr. Broschart just explained, it's two people from each of the ten voting districts in Holmdel, it no longer has to be one male/one female and they make up the Democratic County Committee, which oversees elections or any issues we want to support going on in town, and that's basically the fundamental of the committee makeup.

Commissioner Buffalino: How do you get on that county committee list, by the designation of which section of the town that you're in, how do you actually get put on that list? You're not running for election for it, right?

Ms. Singer: Yes, you're on the ballot. When you go in, we are all elected officials, how you get on it, I think in Holmdel it depends on which party you're in. The Democrats, we have a little more difficulty in getting people to volunteer to be on the committee or to run for office. A lot of times, and it's probably true on the other side, it's word of mouth, who are you involved with in your everyday life, you're talking about what you're doing, somebody hears about it, they decide they want to get a little more involved so they might ask is there a seat open in my voting district. We have some voting districts where we never seem to get volunteers from and we, actually, I know since I've been chair of the committee, do outreach where I will cold call people who are registered Democrats and see if they're willing to get more involved, if they have any interest, if they know anybody in their voting district who has shown an interest. We actually do a lot of outreaches ourselves to bring different people in and that's true not just for our county committee, but when we have elections and we're looking for people to run, I do a lot of phone calling and asking around. Sometimes people are in a busy time of their life right now, so maybe down the road or some people just don't want to be out in public that much, but will help behind the scenes. We're always doing outreach to get people involved.

Commissioner Buffalino: Does anyone on the commission have questions for Ms. Singer regarding that question?

Commissioner Gilstein: In terms of your role as head of this municipal committee, are you elected to be head of the committee or are you just elected by these 20 people?

Ms. Singer: The 20 people decide who will be president and vice president

Commissioner Gilstein: So, it's a public election where the district reps are elected, but then those 20 elected reps choose their president?

Ms. Singer: Exactly. I just wanted to add on to where you were asking about how people get on the committee, we have not, on the Democratic side, had any primaries for these seats, but that is possible. Just like you have a ticket where there could be primaries, it's the same for our seats, there could be primaries where you have people on the party line and then you have people off the party line opposing them. We did have an example of that a few years ago in Holmdel on the Republican side, where the seats were voted on during the primary.

Commissioner Gilstein: So, that's just a matter of people wanting to run?

Ms. Singer: Yes, you have a lot of people who want to run and they don't agree with everything the people who are getting the party line want, they can primary them, they can get on the ballot, too.

Chairman Gee: You mentioned that it's possible that you could, when you do have a primary, you have more than one candidate then there is the party line and then one off the line, how is that actually determined, who determines who's on the party line and who's not on the party line? Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Ms. Singer: It would be done similarly as it is for people running for the township committee, where the slate is put together and the chairperson of the municipal committee, hopefully, with

the input of their full committee and a vote, decides this is the slate that we want on our ticket and they submit that into the County Clerk, which then is to get signed off or looked at by the county chair. So, it works the same process as a township committee election.

Chairman Gee: I was actually asking about candidates for township committee, in particular, I misunderstood; you were talking about the election for the county committee.

Ms. Singer: We've always, on the Democratic side, invited anyone who wants to run to meet with our committee and then the committee would vote on, depending on the year, if it's one or two candidates, who they would like to be on the party line and then it gets submitted. There's a form, the request for position on a ballot and that gets filled out, we tell them we want to be on the party line that's labeled Monmouth County Democrats and that gets submitted to the County Clerk and then it gets signed by the County Chairperson. So, that's where this controversy that so many of your guests that you've had in your last meetings have talked about. You could have where the municipal committee knows who they want on the party line and then that's not given by somebody higher up, the county chairperson. In my time that I've been involved here, I've always said it's been a very lucky time to be a Democrat around here because the local leaders are given that respect to handle their towns. Mr. Broschart mentioned Vin Gopal, he was the County Chairperson when I started, and just to clarify when he became Senator, he did step down from that, because that's a whole other issue and I think there might be some differences on if an elected official should be the chairperson of the county. In our municipal committee, we actually have in our bylaws that anyone who does become a Holmdel township committee person can no longer be on our municipal committee because we don't want the ethical issues that can come up, so when Mr. Gopal became Senator, David Brown became the County Chairperson. The philosophy has always been that the people who know best in the towns and who should be in their local government are the people who live there, the residents or our municipal committee, who's living life here. We're in touch with the residents here, and the philosophy is we have a better idea of who should be running our town. When an issue comes up, I know that the county chairperson will first look to the town's bylaws and say, "Okay well was that followed, who followed it," that's what they're looking to do. In my experience it has not been used as a political tool, and that being said, I'm well aware that we may not always be so lucky, so down the road I personally would lean toward non-partisan elections because you see what happens from all your prior guests and Mr. Broschart spoke very educationally about what goes on, but you had prior guests for whom it was personal how things were handled and how this type of government can personally affect them. You've seen that and that can be true depending on who's running the show on either side, and like I said, I think on my side we've been lucky in the years that I've been here not to have that.

Commissioner Buffalino: So basically, what you're saying is it's better for the residents of your town to be the ones deciding who should be their leaders, not somebody from outside.

Ms. Singer: Yes, I agree with that.

Commissioner Buffalino: Just trying to see if you've already responded to the second question, which was, what role does it play in local elections, in particular for the primary. Do you see it having any major impact on the primary, again, talking about the municipal and county committee?

Ms. Singer: Yes, because as somebody has stated previously at one of your meetings, there's a 35% advantage to being on that party line as opposed to being off the party line. So, you know that, just by itself, is a huge factor.

Commissioner Buffalino: Does anyone on the commission have questions on that issue?

Commissioner Gilstein: So, the municipal committee is deciding who would run on the party line in the primary?

Ms. Singer: Yes.

Chairman Gee: Is that really true, I just want to follow up on that because I thought you said earlier that you have a recommendation on which candidate you would prefer to be on the party line, but then that's submitted to the County Clerk who then really submits that to the county party chair or campaign manager. So, yours is really more of a recommendation, but the final decision is actually at the county level, is that correct?

Ms. Singer: I guess technically.

Chairman Gee: So, if for some reason they said no I don't like that person you have in there and actually want to put someone else who may not even be vetted by your local committee, in theory that could be done.

Ms. Singer: It was done on the Republican side in our town.

Commissioner Gilstein: So, it's possible, but it's not the philosophy that you've experienced.

Ms. Singer: For myself, we have always had our choice of candidate and for most towns around us in Monmouth County have had their choice of candidate put on the ballot, but you have to be realistic in that that could change down the road, depending on who's running things, and I know you're here to make a long-term change in Holmdel not to choose a form of government that's good for the next five years and then changing everything again. So, we can't, in my opinion, base what we think should happen down the road on the politics of today.

Commissioner Buffalino: Are there any questions? There were no questions.

Commissioner Buffalino: Last question, does the process that currently exists either enhances or leads to disparity in how candidates actually run for election in our town specifically, but it could be in any town in New Jersey based on the fact that you have the line and those that are not on the line are somewhere else on the ballot, sometimes pretty far to the right and may not even be noticed by voters. Do you think that's something that dissuades people from running for office, not just because they don't want to be in column seven or the amount of money and time and effort that it takes to run for an election, too, if they're not in line one?

Ms. Singer: Yes, I think the fact that even if it's just the two lines, people are dissuaded because of the fighting that goes on just over politics. Like Mr. Broschart was saying, you wind up with people who are opposing things just because the other party wants it, and especially here in Holmdel, it's people are not here for that kind of a life, they're focused on better things, betterment of the town, the preservation and the land. So, you don't want the politics getting in the mix of all that for the tone of life that we look for when we come here. I think definitely the fact that it is partisan, dissuades people in and of itself. There was one of your prior guests who commented that with the party line, people can feel comfortable if they look up ticket and down

ticket that these are people who will have similar philosophies to them so it makes it easier for them to go into the voting booth and vote down the party line. I think that's a more persuasive argument when you're looking up ticket on a more state and national level, when you have real issues, you're talking death penalty, abortion, these big issues, you might want to look up ticket for people with similar philosophies. We don't vote on those kinds of things in Holmdel, so I don't find the party line to be especially persuasive in the local elections and I think it would be to our benefit to go to the nonpartisan form where our residents can learn about each candidate and what they stand for with respect to Holmdel and not worry about everything else, like our Board of Ed. The Board of Ed is nonpartisan anyway; it's not a big jump for a township to do that. It won't be like residents don't get it, they're familiar with that anyway, so I don't think that would be a huge change. I think when you put all together your input from all the other guests, it doesn't matter if you're a Republican or Democrat in this type of an analysis, and you can see when the pitfalls really affect someone.

Commissioner Buffalino: From what you said, and I think from what Mr. Broschart was saying, divisiveness, because of the distinction between political parties, creates a real problem in a town from getting anything done or stands in the way of any kind of progress sometimes where one party is only voting against something only because the other party likes it, so that is a major problem and I think what you're saying is very helpful.

Ms. Singer: Like I've said over the years, even when it's not just the party versus party, but when there's the division in the party that stalls a lot of things. It's really not good for all the control to be even in a faction of one party because then it cuts out other people in their party who could be good candidates, and if you don't have people running things who are willing to open up and let other people come in and try to get a chance to get on the ballot, that's not good. We give a lot of lip service to saying we want more residents involved, well don't just say it seize the opportunity to actually make that happen. You've had a guest who said certain things about this I like, we just need to tweak this, we need to tweak that, well you wind up tweaking on issues where at the end of the day we all kind of say we agree on and you're winding up with a different form of government anyway, so up to you all to figure out where that leads to.

Commissioner Gilstein: I'm interested in your thoughts on some of the other topics that we've discussed, so what's your thought about electing the mayor directly or indirectly by the committee?

Ms. Singer: I would like to elect the mayor directly, that was a big issue a few years ago that I've written about in our online news forums, where a lot of residents believed that they were electing the mayor. We put re-elect mayor so-and-so on the signs, and people are just thinking they're re-electing this person for mayor and it's natural a jump if you're not following along with what exactly your type of government is, like we are and your guests are. Mr. Broschart said there's really a percentage of people in the town who are really into this and follow along all the time, not everybody is giving it that time, and attention for whatever reason, so there were people who thought they were voting for mayor. Many people come here from New York where that's done, so they are not thinking there's a different way and that it's not done that way and definitely, when it comes to accountability, we need that. If we have a mayor who's on here for more than one year that's by happenstance, that's by everything aligning right, that everybody keeps voting them in, but if there's a disagreement, then all of a sudden they're not mayor anymore, so it's just too fluent and out of the resident's hands and it's another area where I think

we should put a little more responsibility for that into the resident's hands and they can handle it, they can research and see what everybody is about and I have no doubt wherever you live you're going to have your party-line voters, but I think given the size of the town and the nature of the community here, people can handle non-partisan elections and learning about the individuals who are running.

Commissioner Gilstein: The other question I was interested in your thoughts on is the one about the opportunity for residents to put forth a referendum on any topic as opposed to just a capital expenditure or a large capital expenditure. There are other forms of government that admit that opportunity for the citizens; do you have thoughts on that?

Ms. Singer: Yes, I agree with that being that I once carried a petition around Holmdel for when they wanted a referendum for something a few years ago, so I definitely support that. That's another opportunity for residents to have a say in how things go on. For the majority of things, you can leave it up to the five people you've already elected, but sometimes big issues pop up and if you can get the votes for a referendum then that's how it is, let the people have that chance to speak through their vote. I do want to bring up the yearly elections, it's too often, it's not just the candidate involved every year, it's every person on the township committee. A campaign is not "well this person's running so it's taking up their time and their family and their friends," these are group efforts. Campaigns are a group effort and your county committee people are supposed to be helping you, anyone in your party. If there's one of our elected officials re-running, it's not just that they're consumed with the election that year, it's everybody else on the township committee, too, so it's every year that they're all putting time and effort into it and I think it would be nice to have that year off and that extra space to actually get things done because it takes time to get things through government, even in a small town, and the expense of it every year and the lawn signs, every year that's come up. So many people talk about the lawn signs, and I disagree that it's a first amendment issue, I actually have already downloaded some ordinances from other towns that do limit the signage, not everything that is in writing is a first amendment issue so keep your minds open to that. I know you've had some other people just put that out there "hey it's the first amendment issue," and it can't be done. Other towns in Monmouth County have been doing it and that is something I'll be emailing our township committee about, but yes, the signage all over the town spoils the bucolic nature of Holmdel that everybody's always putting in their mail pieces when they're running for election. That may be a little thing in the scheme of things, but it is something that our residents do talk about.

Commissioner Kastning: What do you think is the proper size of the elected officials? Is five, what we have now, sufficient? Would you like more or less?

Ms. Singer: As much as I say it is difficult to get people to run, I would definitely consider bumping it up to seven. I just like a few more voices in the mix. I've been thinking a lot about whether we should have wards question. I get that the ultimate goal of that is to have better representation of the different groups or geographical locations in town, but I think at the end of the day you know it's not New York City, that works there where it's all broken down, I feel like it's Holmdel and I still believe that we can find people who will look out for the good of others on the other side of town or in this corner of town or who lives near Cross Farm or who lives near Route 35, we should be able to do that for one another, and if you expand it to seven maybe you will naturally end up with a better mix of people. In the years I've been involved, I feel like more residents have gotten involved in what goes on at town hall and come to meetings from

different areas in Holmdel, so it might naturally lend itself to just that expansion of seven without having to do a ward system because I can't imagine how many wards you would consider. If you have however many, you have to find people from all those wards to run and that makes it more difficult to say, "okay now we got to find somebody from this little area and then somebody in this area," as opposed to at large.

Commissioner Buffalino: What do you see from the northern part of our town in terms of people wanting to get involved?

Ms. Singer: I'm in Old Manor, I got started in all this when I was in between homes in Holmdel and I was renting in Palmer Square and it's one of my favorite areas in Holmdel. All the residents there were phenomenal, we're all very friendly, and so they knew I was an attorney so they would ring my doorbell and it was great, and when I got involved, I said, let me see what's going on with this and that was how I first ended up going to township meeting not first kind of my round two. When I was first living in Holmdel, I was involved as the president of Country Woods, which wasn't in my intro, so back then I did have a lot more involvement in representing that community and being at town hall in that role. Then I had a few years where I wasn't really involved and then the issue on Palmer got me re-involved and that issue has definitely brought out more people from that side of Holmdel to follow things and get involved, and the flooding continues on Route 35. I'm aware that people will get involved when there is an issue.

Commissioner Buffalino: The township committee announced at their meeting on Tuesday they're going to form some kind of a study themselves on the storm water issues while they're waiting for Rutgers to deliver their report, so I thought that was a good move and a good signal that they're not just sitting back and saying this is not a problem in certain sections of town so we're not going to really look into it. It is a problem and it would be a bigger problem for everybody if the storm activity increases its intensity, so we're all involved in this like you said it pays to be mindful of other people in town because eventually it's going to affect you in one way or another.

Ms. Singer: The bad reputation your neighborhood gets affects everybody's property values and who wants to move here or not. I just want to clarify because you said the township committee is going to do a study, is it going to be a professional study?

Commissioner Buffalino: Yes, they're hiring an engineering firm to do that, they were relying on the delivery of the Rutgers study before, which has been delayed, so they're going to do it on their own.

Ms. Singer: We definitely needed a bigger study; Middletown is affected as well and there's a lot to understand in doing that kind of study from the geography of it as well. It's a good thing, those are the kind of things that money gets spent on, and residents are like that's okay if that's what they're spending money on.

Commissioner Buffalino: Regardless of your party, you should be in favor of that no matter who on the township committee brought it up.

Chairman Gee: Does anyone else have any questions?

The commissioners thanked Ms. Singer for coming

New Business

Chairman Gee: Before I open up for public comment, I want to touch base on two items we've been holding the meetings on a virtual basis because of the surge in Covid, and I think we said maybe at the end of January. Let's revisit the issue, my understanding is that the township committee is currently looking to continue on a virtual basis through February, that may change at some point, but that's my understanding right now. Are you folks okay with continuing with that? Any objection, any discussion about that?

Commissioner Kastning: I'm fine either way.

Chairman Gee: The second item, I think we heard a number of things that came out of the previous guests, as well as even today, people talk about this local committee, municipal committee called the county committee and then there's some numbers that have been thrown around. I know we have a public hearing coming up at the next meeting on the 3rd and I think the next regular scheduled meeting is February 17th, but we have some expected guests that are going to be there, and I wonder if it's okay with the rest of the commissioners maybe to schedule an additional meeting in February. Are you all okay with adding a meeting on February 9th and looking to maybe invite someone from academia or a professor to talk a little bit more about the line and the impact of that in some of these elections? Any objections to that?

Commissioner Kastning: Mr. Gilstein and I are on the Environmental Commission and that's when they meet.

Chairman Gee: Why don't I go offline and just try and figure out a schedule where we can maybe add a meeting or something like that, because I would like to add a guest so let's table that for now and we'll see how the schedules mesh. Any other new business items from the commissioners before I open up for public comments?

Chairman Gee explained the process for public comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman Gee asked for a motion to adjourn this meeting. Commissioner Kastning offered a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Berk. A voice vote confirmed all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Bonnie K. Thomas – Holmdel Charter Study Commission Secretary