

House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs
Representative Matthew Birong – Chair

My name is Chris Palermo. I currently serve as vice-chair on the Morristown Selectboard. As a former resident of Waterbury, I served as a member and vice-chair on the Waterbury Selectboard for 16 years. Prior to that I was a member and chair of the Waterbury Town Planning Commission.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Town of Morristown regarding H.17, the proposed Town of Morristown Charter.

In watching prior testimony and committee discussion on our Charter proposal, I am aware that there are questions regarding Section 3, a and b, Town Manager responsibilities, particularly the last sentence in part b.

The Town of Morristown Selectboard appointed citizens and Town staff to work with the Selectboard as a Charter Committee to develop Morristown's first Charter. The decision was to make this proposal simple and straight forward and then take time to thoughtfully and thoroughly develop any amendments that would enhance the operations of our community. The final draft presented to the Selectboard, and ultimately the Town voters, utilized legislative approved language from several municipalities. The language selected by the committee and the board was felt to best represent what our goals are in our new Town Manager form of government.

In my 18 years of municipal experience, I have witnessed firsthand how valuable tenured department heads are in the management of personnel, budgets, and day to day operations. They command the respect of the employees and are present in the trenches literally every day and night. By giving the Manager the ability to authorize a department head to hire, appoint, discipline, or remove an employee, subject to the Manager's discretion and supervision respects the department head's expertise and experience in their vocation.

We feel that this does not diminish the Town Manager's responsibilities under State statute, rather it's meant to enhance the Manager's ability to perform them by collaboratively working with the Manager's leadership team. Additionally, this does not supersede the Town Personnel Policy, and it does not supersede the two current union agreements, or the third union agreement currently being negotiated. As the Chief Executive Officer of a municipality, with all the different tasks that are demanded, allowing the Manager to exercise the ability to engage department heads in these decisions is an invaluable asset.

Reviewing a number of municipal Charters, the committee, the Selectboard, and ultimately the Town voters by a 5 – 1 margin feel this represents how we would like to move forward.

We hope that you will support our municipality in the approval of our first Charter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Chris Palermo