

8 June 2023

George Kuper, Haydon Hall

I have been encouraged by fellow residents to raise the issue of badly needed Charter revisions. It may not be popular with those who are currently entrusted with the unchecked, total control of the Town's activity. But, good governance requires some checks and balances in our system. Sent some suggestions to Phil and Jackie's Charter, Codes, and Ordinances Committee which did not get me an enthusiastic response. , I raise for your consideration, please:

1. Art. III; sect. 2 – I think we need 2 Year terms for members of Town Council. Getting individuals to commit to 4 years unnecessarily narrows the pool of candidates. And, it reduces the sensitivity of elected officials to the needs and desires of the electorate.
2. Art. III; sect. 12 – Needs to be changed to read: *The council may adopt rules for regulating its proceedings, but no tax shall be levied, or corporate debt contracted, except by a recorded two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the council and a majority affirmative vote via referendum of the registered resident voters of the Town. The appropriation of money exceeding the sum of one (hundred) one thousand dollars shall require (be made, except by) a recorded affirmative vote of a majority of all the members elected to the council. (1958, c. 366)*

This is really important! Any long-term financial commitment the Town incurs is too important not to get the citizens' buy-in. At least one member of the committee has told me he thinks it unnecessary. I therefore feel the need to raise for your consideration the need for taxpayer approval of any debt to be incurred by the Town.

3. Art. III; sect. 13 and following Articles and Sections provide authorities for the Town to do all sorts of things which are mostly

duplicative and probably not something a town of 500 people needs, nor wants to operate. (e.g. Does Irvington really need to operate a jail?) Let's clean it up.

The charter was written at a time when the town's circumstances (both socially and economically) were very different. When I first read it a half dozen years ago I thought it was very unusual to give any governmental body the authorities the charter does as it combines executive and legislative functions in one body – the Council - without any formal 'checks or balances' (except a four year term for Council members).

The town's current situation where the Council may be actively pursuing an investment agenda not endorsed by the town's population makes more obvious to me - and others - the need for revising the charter. Clarifying governance responsibilities is a good thing to do.

The basic issue our town is facing is the speeding up of the gradual shift from a primarily residential community (post WW2) to a combined business and residential community as more residences turn into money making ventures and capital appreciation of property becomes more important than livability.

As you all know, the town's revenue is currently primarily dependent on one source of revenue – occupancy rates of short-term beds. (The town's property tax was initiated specifically to offset the potential shortfall in occupancy revenue from the Tides Inn closing down temporarily.) The prospect of long-term debt on that funding base gives me the creeps as the fallback surety for that debt service is higher property taxes on residents which forces the shift away from residency to business (either operating or selling property) even more rapidly. It is quite possible that with the current anticipated County property tax increases we will soon experience a 'tax pricing out' where current occupants will be selling because their fixed retirement incomes cannot bear the additional pressure.

This is really a plea for residents to have a voice in just how rapidly what change occurs, not anti-business and not anti-growth. It is to promote livability in our community. That is why I suggest a referendum for any prospective long-term town debt.

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1. I am **against a meals tax** in Irvington at this time. It may be appropriate in the future to support a well defined and publicly supported capital investment; or, offset to a property tax reduction/removal; or other defined purpose. In the absence of said well-defined and publicly supported investment, it is not needed at this point except to support the highly inflated proposed FY 23'24 budget. Sadly, the absurd rationale advanced in previous Council discussion that 'we're the only local jurisdiction that doesn't have a meals tax' reveals a cavalier attitude toward the tax paying consumer and the commercial institutions designated to collect the tax.

2. I am **opposed to the FY23/24 budget proposed by the Budget Committee.**

A. Not sure how Council can approve this budget as it depends on \$186k of revenue from a potential meals tax.

B. Don't know what guidance from Council the committee had for their deliberations. But, assuming reasonable fiscal management which Council has to date well demonstrated, it would appear that this budget

proposal inflates the Town's needs. Revenue is projected to exceed expenditures by \$65k or 15%. The Capital Budget proposes funding a set of projects in an unrealistic time frame too large to possibly conduct in a fiscally responsible manner. The result will be that monies unspent will be added to the already very healthy cash reserves on the Town's balance sheet. There has been conversation by Council members that would indicate one or more large capital projects as yet undefined, possibly focused on sewer facilities and/or waterfront access – both ideas opposed by a majority of citizen survey responses- would be facilitated by this build-up of reserves. **I suspect raising public money in the absence of realistically defined need is against the law.** Perhaps some members of Council are of the mind that they can more easily persuade a majority of the citizens to support their currently unknown, possibly undesired, project if a 'pot of gold' is in hand when they decide to reveal their plans to us. This budget – and other behind the scenes activity - gives rise to distrusting the actions of the Council.

3. Fortunately, Council has the more responsible Capital Budget proposal from the Planning Commission. **I support Council utilizing the PC proposed Capital Budget in revising the proposed FY 23/24 Town budget.**