

Notes on Conversation with Peter Talbot  
Cheshire, Town Council Chair/Mayor  
March 31, 2025

Rachel Sondheimer and Mike Rettger conducted a virtual interview with Peter Talbot, the Chair of the Town Council of Cheshire on March 31, 2025.

### **Background on Cheshire, CT**

Cheshire has a population of around 29,000 people and has a Town Council with a town manager as its form of government. The chair of the Town Council acts as the mayor. There are 9 seats on the town council with 4 coming out of town districts and the 5 others as at-large representatives. The members serve 2-year terms and everyone runs concurrently. The town council is scheduled to meet once a month but usually avails itself of the optional second meeting each month. Cheshire moved away from a town meeting form of government in 1971 to increase representation as the town grew. At the time of the switch, Cheshire had a 3-person board of selectpersons and a town meeting.

### **Participation**

Turnout in municipal elections tends to hover around 35% but sometimes it can tick up to 40% if there is a high salience issue on the ballot. There tends to be low participation in town council meetings unless there is a big issue under consideration. A town forum is used as a backstop for discussing important issues. Town council meetings are streamed on YouTube and saved there. Very few people watch them live but the recordings usually have around 700 views in the following few weeks.

Talbot noted that low participation is a universal issue regardless of the size of the town or the form of government. He noted that the YouTube streaming was an effort to solve the problem.

### **Media**

There is no true local newspaper left in the town. The Cheshire Herald was purchased and folded into Hearst in a series of moves resulting in most of the coverage coming out of Hartford. Social media has filled the void with 3 different Facebook forums with “varying levels of vitriol.”

### **State Relations**

The town manager engages with the state government in Hartford. They also have a good relationship with the legislative delegation, which comes to a town council meeting annually to hear about issues important to the town.

### **Advice**

-Talbot said that the decisions on form of government should not be based on current personnel. He said we should be looking at what is best for the town not what is best for the current players. In terms of population size, he recommends a town manager with a town council.

-Talbot said there are some great potential town managers out there and that towns need someone with a good background, especially in finance. In Cheshire, the town manager proposes the budget for the town.

-Talbot said to make sure that there is a good attorney working on any changes to municipal governing structures.