

## **Charter Review Committee**

### **Minutes**

October 13, 2016 6:00 p.m.

Glenwood Recreation Center

1888 Fairmont Avenue, Columbus, Ohio

(audio tape and closed caption record available in the City Clerk's office)

#### **Committee Members in Attendance:**

Stefanie L. Coe, Chair

Jennette B. Bradley

Frieda L. Gilyard

Frederick E. Mills

John C. Rosenberger

Robert Vitale

(Committee Members Lourdes Barroso de Padilla, Rev. Tyrone A. Lawes, and Keary McCarthy absent)

#### **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Committee Chair Stefanie Coe opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m., welcomed everyone to Glenwood Recreation Center and thanked staff and students for making the Committee feel welcome.

#### **Approval of the Minutes**

Hearing no questions or corrections from Members of the Committee regarding the Minutes, Chair Coe asked for a motion to approve the Minutes, as submitted.

Mills moved, Bradley seconded. All voted in favor. Motion carried and Minutes were approved.

#### **Summary of Public Comments received to date**

Stephanie Megas reported that the committee has received 13 public comment submissions from Mid-September to date. There are two mediums in which council has been collecting that public comment, and it is mostly all online. One is the online forum on the Charter Review Committee website: [Columbus.gov/council/charter-review/committee/public-comments](http://Columbus.gov/council/charter-review/committee/public-comments). You cannot submit attachments at that location, so the other option is to send emails directly to [charter@Columbus.gov](mailto:charter@Columbus.gov). Committee members were provided with a summary of the 13 public comments and also a hardcopy of each submission for his/her review.

Vitale asked about telephone inquiries and how they were responded to. Megas replied that as calls are received at the city, they are usually directed through the City Clerk's office and they are forwarded to staff for reply.

Chair Coe reminded those watching or in attendance that they can submit a request online to speak at any of the meetings and the deadline is Noon on the day of the meeting. If you have not pre-registered and arrive at the meeting and would like to speak, you can turn in a speaker slip prior to the start of the meeting as well. As mentioned in the first meeting, we will take relevant comments to the narrow topics that we are addressing first, and if other comments have been submitted, as time

permits, they will be presented. All comments, however, regardless of topic, are being shared by staff with the committee members.

### **Committee Discussion on previous public comments and presentations**

Chair Coe asked if committee members had follow up questions or comments about presentations from the last meeting.

### **Presentation and Discussion**

**Honorable Michael Curtin, State Representative for the Ohio House 17th district.** (presentation on file in Charter Review Committee records)

Representative Curtin departed from his prepared comments to add for context that the late '60s were very tumultuous times in our neighborhoods and campuses. The democratic majority on council which had taken control in the 1965 elections were very cognizant that here the African-American community was an important part of the democratic coalition and yet the city council was an all-white council as it had been since 1916. There was a strong element of consideration as to how they were going to get minorities elected to Council. Some Democrats, especially some that considered themselves more progressive like Jim Bowman, proposed the hybrid council of at-large districts to be responsible to the concerns of the African-American community. It might also be noteworthy that one month prior to that May 1968 vote Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated culminating in the type of racial unrest that existed in the country. Every election is conducted within a context of social forces because of social conditions, and those were the social conditions at play when the citizens of Columbus went to the polls in May to decide whether to change the structure of city council.

(Curtin resumed his prepared presentation)

Representative Curtin concluded by stating that he was privileged to share some historical perspective with the committee and that the optimum structure of the council is a question that exists from time to time. It needs to be re-visited from time to time in the light of new realities and new circumstances in an ever-changing city. He commended the Committee members for their study and offered to answer any questions.

Vitale asked is there evidence from 1916 when this was put in place that it was intended to limit minority participation. Curtin responded it was an open process back then and was covered by the press. The Commission was led by two people that were widely esteemed across the city. Curtin said based on his reading of history is that this proposed charter was seen as being with the progressive era reform spirit to clean up city council.

He stated when this was first on the ballot in 1968, Mayor Sensenbrenner supported it, and he was a Democrat. The Democratic Party was in control of council, but it was split. The forces within City Hall supported the proposal. The people who were running the county party however, did not, so the Democratic Party was neutral. If you go back and look at the microfilm, Mayor Sensenbrenner encouraged the party to stay neutral. He didn't lobby their support; the papers said he wanted this issue to be above politics and partisanship. He thought good government was not to pit Democrats

against Republicans. In 1975, Dr. Rosemond spoke for the party and they were supportive of the hybrid plan. The Republican Party was uniformly opposed, as was Republican Mayor Tom Moody.

Bradley thanked Curtin for the historical perspective. Bradley asked if we could have same analysis from the recent issue 1 vote, for example, which areas supported the proposal and which areas did not. Staff indicated that they would prepare that analysis for members of the Committee.

Mr. Mills stated that Mr. Curtin has done a lot of work on historical perspectives in state government, and his books are very good sources of information. He asked about campaign finance expenditures that he has tracked at the state level and asked if he had looked at campaign finance at the city level. Representative Curtin responded that he had not.

Coe thanked rep. Curtin for his time and participation in this process.

Second presentation was by **Edward Johnson, Council liaison to committee** addressing various structures of Council's around Ohio. Material/report is included in committee member packets. (presentation is included in charter review committee records) Additionally Mr. Johnson's comments as well as Representative Curtin's can be found on the website for the public to review.

Mr. Johnson concluded that in subsequent meetings, Committee members will receive research on national peer cities and benchmark cities based on size, growth rate, similarities, and their place on the best cities index and other factors and any cities that committee members might ask staff to include in their research. Chair Coe thanked Mr. Johnson and asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Bradley thanked Mr. Johnson and asked which peer cities were used in research. Johnson responded that staff will look at cities like Portland and Austin because of their size and similarities and Indianapolis as well. He indicated they will probably also take a look at some of the larger cities like Chicago, but those will be geographically diverse. Cities of a similar size will most likely include Austin, San Francisco, Portland, and possibly Jacksonville.

Rosenberger asked if there is any metric of citizen satisfaction. Johnson stated that he was not aware of one, and some of this will be left to the committee to determine after receiving data and community input. Coe responded that if you are going to change something, understanding what value that change is going to bring is important and in her opinion, it is very hard to have a metric. Chair Coe asked staff if we have any data on how often those cities are changing their form of government. Johnson responded that staff can provide as additional research for all of the 15 cities. Chair Coe questioned if those cities use something as the reason for change? Based on Representative Curtin's testimony, something triggered the change. If staff could come up with some statistical data, it would be helpful. She stated that our community/citizens have now voted three times to defeat a change to the structure.

Rosenberger added that he had started to think along those same lines "if people are changing, what are they changing to?" Then wondered about whether it was "the flavors of the day" and that maybe changes were made on an irrational basis.

Chair Coe thanked Mr. Johnson and reiterated that the Committee's next meeting is Thursday October 27<sup>th</sup> and encouraged anyone present or watching that this is the opportunity for people to

provide comments. Upcoming topics are about the size of council, wards/districts. These meetings are to give citizens an opportunity to voice questions, comments, concerns, and suggestions.

Coe stated that we didn't have any additional speaker slips, but asked if anyone in the audience wanted to address the committee and also asked if any of the committee members wanted to make any comments or raise any issues.

Bradley commented about satisfaction and economic environment. She stated that you might find when you look at the research there's usually some reason why there was the initiative to change. In general, are people happy and how do we measure that? She stated that we had already made some changes within the city administration by adding area commissions and also the addition of neighborhood liaisons and wondered if there is any type of customer satisfaction or information that is coming up through those channels.

### **Public comments**

Will Petrik, 350 East Tompkins, began by stating that he would like to offer an idea of what is the criteria by which we judge the quality of our local government, particularly in the national context right now that so many people feel like our democracy is broken, that big money has kind of completely overrun our politics. With Citizens United and also in Columbus, one of the things he is hoping this committee will discuss is campaign contribution limits since we don't have campaign contribution limits at the local level. He commented that there are a lot of people that feel like big developers, corporate CEOs, the Columbus partnership have a say in the direction of our neighborhoods and the direction of our city and people feel like their participation doesn't matter. He thanked the committee for their service, and stated he was glad this process was initiated.

Chair Coe thanked Mr. Petrik for his comments.

Rosenberger responded that one of the ways we talk to our people is when we vote. Do people vote because they are happy or vote because they are mad. For instance, if we looked at populations and voter participation, voter registration and then voter participation, would some pattern appear where it looked like -- would we eventually conclude that if people think they are having an effect, they show up and vote, or if they feel it is beyond their power, they don't bother to show up? Is there something we can pull from this that lets us identify places where people are registering and in fact showing up and voting, presumably because they think that they are being heard? Is that a possible insight into sort of satisfaction with government?

Chair Coe responded that it may be a topic we can think about. She echoed that this is an opportunity for as many people as possible to have a chance to express their opinions and participate. She is hopeful others will take advantage and attend the committee's upcoming meetings.

Vitale asked if campaign finance is within the Committee's purview. Chair Coe responded that in general, that topic is not within the specific scope of what we were asked to look at and she stated that it was her understanding that campaign finance issues can now be addressed by City Council itself and would not be considered a charter amendment. Mr. Johnson indicated that the charter authorizes City Council to address these issues through ordinance.

Coe added that this Committee has a limited scope but all comments are being included as part of the record of these meetings and will, in turn, be forwarded to City Council for review. Rosenberger stated he was confused by the response as to how this works and that it is a blend of things that Council can change and other items that require charter revision and whether items that Council can deal with through ordinance are off limits for discussion by this Committee. Chair Coe clarified that this committee doesn't necessarily have to address only things that are charter amendments and that it can recommend things that may be process changes, etc. However, when Council and the Mayor's office put this committee together there was a limited scope of what we are asked to address. Campaign finance issues and/or reform were not part of our charge. If the committee thinks a topic merits further exploration, we should further explore that topic. Mills added that while currently the charter gives the council authority, citizens could vote on a charter amendment that would create a campaign finance change of authority.

Coe replied that the Committee could recommend a charter change although as we look at what tasks we were specifically asked to look at, we were asked to address the size of council, whether wards or districts are the right answer, and the appointment or vacancy-filling process.

### **Adjournment**

Hearing no further questions or concerns, Chair Coe asked for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Mills moved, Ms. Bradley seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.