



November 29, 2016  
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS  
Charter Review Commission  
City Council Room – City Hall  
7:00 PM

**CALL TO ORDER**

**ROLL CALL**

**SALUTE TO FLAG**

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

**MINUTES**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**ADJOURN**



November 29, 2016  
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS Charter  
Review Commission  
City Council Room – City Hall  
7:00 PM

PRESENT: Jeff Altamari  
Gordon Boyd  
Ann Casey Bullock  
Laura Chodos  
Elio DelSette  
Pat Kane  
BK Keramati  
Robert Kuczynski  
Mike Los  
Minita Sanghvi  
Robert Turner  
Beth Wurtmann

ABSENT: Matt Jones  
Devin Dal Pos  
Barbara Thomas

STAFF: Tony Izzo

### **RECORDING OF PROCEEDING**

The proceedings of this meeting were taped for the benefit of the secretary. Because the minutes are not a verbatim record of the proceedings, the minutes are not a word-for-word transcript.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Robert Turner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Bonnie Sellers said the meeting announcement need to be distributed to the public sooner than it was today. She said these are public meetings and they need to be advertised appropriately.

## **MINUTES**

Gordon Boyd moved and Pat Kane seconded to approve the November 22, 2016, meeting minutes. Ayes all.

## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

### **Survey**

Robert Turner said the surveys to the City Hall employees and the Civic Leaders had gone out. He has 98 responses from the Civic Leaders which was about a 50 percent return rate. He also has about 33 responses from City Hall staff.

## **GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Pat Kane said he reviewed the material from the meeting that was held at the library saying that if we were to do the same exercise today, how we would we respond now. He reviewed the priorities from the material which included: economic priority, check and balance of power, separation of powers, minimize political bickering, enhance citizen engagement, improved administrative interaction, responsive organizational operation, modern communication tools and practices, foster collaboration in and out of government, citizen friendly and understandable organization, flexibility and nimble, strategically focuses, long and short term budgeting processes and practices, efficient governance, workforce enablement, stakeholder involvement, aligned with community's needs, professionalism at all levels, Human Resources oriented, premier crisis management, sustainability, unified economic development fiscal responsibility citizen engagement and online service delivery. He asked Commission members to review this material and think about what else might need to be added.

Minita Sanghvi said diversity and inclusion needs to be discussed. Pat Kane said that at one time citizens believed this was a vibrant ethnic community, but it is not. Minita Sanghvi said this is not simply about race, it is cultural, religious, LGBT related, etc. She said Saratoga County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state, but the people are not coming to Saratoga Springs. Pat Kane said that cultural diversity is not on the radar. Minita Sanghvi said that while we are addressing the charter and because it will not likely be reviewed again for ten years, we need to think about what our community will look like in ten years. She said there could be another 50 percent new voter registration rate. Elio DelSette asked what she perceived was the pronounced negativism concerning diversity. Minita Sanghvi said that most recently there have been swastikas painted throughout the community. Gordon Boyd said half of his family is Hispanic but within the school district there are virtually no Hispanic teachers. He said teachers are typically white and the district is prevalent with nepotism. The backstretch workers are typically a large Hispanic population and are seasonal. He said it can't be said that we don't have a problem, we just don't think about it. The Belmont Child Care Association is looking to expand here in Saratoga. Elio DelSette said it is seasonal. Gordon Boyd said it is not just six weeks, it is now six months and potentially could be longer. He said this is an issue that needs to be addressed, but because it does not fit within one of the "five silos", no Council member one wants to take it on. Gordon Boyd said EOC has programs, but there needs to be more. Laura Chodos said that perhaps there needs to be some sort of welcoming guide book that welcomes people to our community. Pat Kane said in this day and age, people rely on the internet for that information.

Pat Kane said this is all good conversation and we need to remember this as we go through the document. BK Keramati said in the context of the charter it is important for us to ask the question “how does this document enable these voices to be heard” and how does this document enable representation for everyone in the community. He said the form of government has a direct influence on this. He said we need to think about how well people are represented by the elected officials. Does the current form allow people to be heard? Pat Kane said we are really looking at three or four alternatives. Jeff Altamari said when we talk about missions statements, we need to add ethical behavior among the leaders and the workforce.

Pat Kane asked that Commission members look this material over and get back to him. Bob Turner said economic development is an important issue. He said people have choices on where to live and where to locate their firms and they base those choices on quality of life and inclusive behavior. He said diversity is key in that decision making. Residents want to be sure the community is tolerant and welcoming. Skidmore is trying to attract a more diverse faculty. He said a welcoming community is critical to compete in the global market place.

Minita Sanghvi said that according to the 2010 census for Saratoga County, all minority groups made up 8.1 percent of the population. In the City of Saratoga Springs the minority group made up 10.5 percent of the population. She reminded everyone though that this only focuses on race and not religion, LGBT or other cultural diversities. She that many people locate elsewhere because they are looking for places of worship. She did not believe the school population was diverse enough. The household median income is \$92,000. Elio DelSette said many years ago, the traditions and customs were quite different. There was a larger African American community located in parts of the City. He said many of the African Americans traveled with the families who traveled here for the summer months. Jeff Altamari agreed that at one point there was a larger service population in this area, but it was time to look forward not back. He said that Global Foundries is bringing in large diverse populations of employees. Economic Development is important and within that there needs to be some thought given to health, arts, recreation, tax incentives, etc. He said those are the things that bring people to communities. Pat Kane said we want our children to come back here. We need to have an economic revolving door. Ann Bullock said we need to foster the mom and pop businesses as well. Workforce housing is critical to these discussions. Elio DelSette said we are not a blue collar community anymore. Our rental pools are shrinking because of the longer tourism season. He said we need to give some thought to those summer residents and whether they are participating in our community activities. Jeff Altamari said there is a large pool of retired people that we need to tap into. Elio DelSette said there are class distinctions throughout the community. He said the old smaller neighborhoods that were once a cultural part of this community are now gone. He asked how the charter could address all of these issues. Gordon Boyd said that the Charter itself will not address diversity or affordable housing, but the structure of the government will allow for coordination for someone to take it on. Right now it takes three of the Council members to agree to get behind an issue in order for it to be addressed. With this current form, we could have all five Council members going in five directions. He said we could create a platform by which these issues can be addressed.

Pat Kane again asked that members get back to him with their suggestions on this matter. Bob Turner said he could create a survey out of this if members would like.

BK Keramati suggested asked if it is possible to have this current form of government but not have the Commissioners actually run a department, but rather simply monitor the department.

Elio DelSette said we could likely set up any form, but we are predisposed to the political system. BK Keramati said they would be Commissioners at large. Administration of a department would not be a requirement. Minita Sanghvi clarified that they would have no departmental duties. BK Keramati said they would have no departmental duties. There would be one person running the City. Minita Sanghvi asked if the Mayor would have the same equal vote. Gordon Boyd said this type of proposal is a legislative body without calling it a legislative body. He said the principal question is the separation of power. He said if BK Keramati is suggesting that the administrative functions be unified and the legislative powers be separated from that, then in fact we are creating a legislative government. Pat Kane agreed saying that there is a level of “tweaking” that can be done to this document, but something like this goes behind maintaining what we have. He said there are thousands of hybrid governments out there, but we should probably stick to one of the three distinct forms. BK Keramati said he was not proposing a legislative form. He is proposing that rather than administratively running a department, the elected officials would simply monitor the department. Gordon Boyd said we are now debating something that we don’t even have in draft form. He said that we need to get specific proposals on paper before debating. Elio DelSette said we need to start with the current charter. We need to be more specific in our discussion on the review of the current charter and whether we plan to maintain it or not.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

Pat Kane asked that each Commission member describe what they have learned so far, what they have heard from people and what they do not yet know enough about.

BK Keramati said he would like to know more about how the current charter works, how the current city employees function under the current charter, how do large outside entities interact with the City and what is working.

Jeff Altamari said he has some concerns with our time frames. He wanted to have some discussion on different models and our preferences soon. He said we need to address what our end game is. We have learned a lot about employee morale, dysfunction, commissioners’ roles, etc. He said it was likely that the drafting committee had done its work but there needed to be a lot of discussion on what is constitutional vs. administrative. He said it was easy to carve things out, but believed we need help to do that. He said the former Commission did a great job with the financial section. It was time to address the personnel section and we should hire Mark Lawton to help us do that.

Mike Los said whatever we settle on there are financial impacts that need to be addressed, i.e., labor issues, health care, etc., and how do we quantify that. We need to have a better understanding of the financial implications – increased, decreased or revenue neutral.

Robert Kuczynski said we have heard a lot about what people like and don’t like about this charter, but asked whether those concerns were inherent to the charter or this form of government. He said the Recreation Department is a good example of how it impacts several departments, but is outside of a department. He also had concerns with the degree to which the current charter is being adhered to. He said we need to figure out whether some of the issues such as communication have underlying issues such as technical or infrastructure related. He said there are places in the charter to address these issues.

Laura Chodos said she had learned a lot. She was concerned that the Council has not carried out some of the items in the existing charter. There needs to be more focus on personnel issues. She said BK Keramati mentioned monitoring versus administering and she liked that idea. She believed we could come up with a remarkable document. She believed that an electorate that monitors and not administers could be the way to go. She said a ward system was a good way for residents to have their voices heard, however, there are advantages to being one whole community and not broken up into wards.

Gordon Boyd said he had learned that the default budget process is an important asset for the City and we should preserve that in whatever we decide to do. He said that process, though, is not dependent on the commission form. He said the amount of time that Council members put into these positions is tremendous considering there is little money. There is a lot of power though. He relayed a story about the church he belongs to on Washington Street and trying to get the surrounding property owners to buy into making a commitment to upgrade the infrastructure in that area. The project was contingent upon getting a grant which Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner was successful in doing. Once the funding was available and the property owners were prepared to move forward, they were told by the City Engineer that it was not worth his time to complete the application. Because the City Engineer worked in another department in City Hall there was nothing they could do. He said there is structural dysfunction in City Hall but people who need to conduct business with City Hall are afraid to raise issues for fear of retribution. He said the financial management portion of the budget needs to be maintained. He said the clock is ticking though and we need to come to some decision on whether we are keeping the existing charter or do something different.

Minita Sanghvi said if someone wanted to make a motion this evening they should do so. She said she had learned a lot about the discord and dysfunction, but she really wanted to hear from the employees. The common thread in all of the discussions/presentations/interviews has been dysfunction. She agreed the financial management section of the existing charter is important. She also said that we need to discuss thoroughly the financial implication of what we are doing. The Outreach Committee will need to do that. She had some concerns that the text "shall" still did not seem to make people do what they are supposed to. She asked how we might force the charter to be followed. There needs to be some checks and balances post charter review. She said there are only ten or so meeting dates left and we need some clarity to get moving.

Ann Bullock said that we have heard from a lot of people in the interview process and what sticks with her is that "politics gets in the way". She said that in spite of the charter, staff is doing what they need to. In some cases they go around the existing charter. She said that is because there are good employees. She said the City Attorney works because of the people in the position, but if we didn't have such ethical individuals, it might not work (not that it actually has not.) She said it seems that this form does not foster collegiality. Staff needs to be encouraged to upgrade their skills. At this point there is no career path for employees. She said during the public hearing there are 15 people speaking with 7 supporting this form, 7 not supporting this form and one that she couldn't quite figure out. She also said that with the current political climate, she was not sure that there would be interest from the public on a special election. She said drafting a charter and the financial impact statement were very large, complex tasks that needed to be addressed.

Elio DelSette said we have a good foundation with the existing charter. He said we need to decide if we are going to accept or reject the existing document. He reminded everyone that the

interviews are from personal points of view and we need to keep in mind that personalities often skew reality. He said we also need to look at the motivations of those who were interviewed. He said it is dangerous to take what some of these interviewees said without verifying it. He said most of the employees in City Hall are good, long standing employees, but recently more and more are not staying. They are leaving for more money. He said he wanted to hear from the employees and not just negative things from employees.

Elio DelSette asked if a Treasurer had been appointed. Bob Turner said that Gordon Boyd was the Treasurer.

Pat Kane said he has spent a great deal of time on charter review over the recent years. He has learned a lot about modernization and professionalism. There are benefits to looking back, but it was now time to look forward. He said after all of this he has come to the conclusion that there are poor opportunities for women to run for these Council positions. He said there are a lot of good things in the existing charter, but there is also no “charter police” to ensure that the charter is followed. He said there is no assurance that the work put in by this charter commission will actually be implemented. There needs to be some consideration on how we make the Council do what they are supposed to. He believed that the charter needs to reflect what the people outside of City Hall think. We need to modernize it. He said he needed to learn a little more about what being a strong mayor would entail. He believed that we should start with a good clean document and then write something new.

Elio DelSette asked what assurance did we have that a City Manager would improve the conditions. Gordon Boyd said we are drafting a document and placing it on the ballot for the voters to decide. It will be up to the voters to approve or disapprove. Elio DelSette agreed but further stated that we are making recommendations to the public.

Bob Turner said that he took exception to Elio DelSette’s comments that we had not been “academic” enough in our process. He said we have spoken to a lot of people in different levels of the government, elected officials and other various stakeholders. He said it is up to Commission members to compare and contrast those statements. What he has heard is that it is difficult to get things done when going through various departments. He said there are speed bumps in those processes and he did not believe that it was personalities – it is the structure. He said he was also alarmed to learn the amount of time that Council members put into these positions. Some of these positions are 24/7. Deputy Commissioner positions are hard to fill because of limited opportunities and short term stability. He said we are not on the front lines with other cities at conferences. There is a frustration expressed by the public. If we proposed something new there will be challenges in shifting to a new style. He said he continues to struggle on how to do a public survey.

### **NEXT SET OF MEETINGS**

Gordon Boyd said at one of the next couple of upcoming meetings he planned to make a motion on whether we keep the existing form or move on to something else. Jeff Altamari said he too planned to make motions soon to get this process moving along.

Bob Turner said he would have the results of the civic leader survey by next Monday, December 5. He suggested at the December 13 meeting motions be made to determine our direction.

BK Keramati said he wanted to hear what City Hall employees are saying. He said unlike Elio DelSette he was willing to accept on face value how employees respond to the survey. He did not want to question their integrity or motivation.

Bob Turner said at the December 5 meeting we will review the results of the surveys and review strong mayor forms of government. The following meeting on Tuesday, December 13 would be used to make decisions on where we are going.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Gordon Boyd moved and Pat Kane second to adjourn the meeting at 8:59 p.m. Ayes all. There being no further business, Bob Turner adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine A. Moran  
Clerk

Approved 12/13/2016