



January 12, 2017
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
Charter Review Commission
Music Hall – City Hall
7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

SALUTE TO FLAG

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

MINUTES

COMMITTEE REPORTS

ADJOURN



January 12, 2017
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
Charter Review Commission
Music Hall – City Hall
7:00 PM

PRESENT: Jeff Altamari
Gordon Boyd
Laura Chodos
Devin Dal Pos
Matt Jones
Pat Kane
Robert Kuczynski
Minita Sanghvi
Barbara Thomas
Robert Turner

ABSENT: Ann Casey Bullock
Elio DelSette
BK Keramati
Mike Los
Beth Wurtmann

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

Chair Robert Turner opened the meeting for public comment. There being no one wishing to speak, Chair Robert Turner closed the public comment period.

MINUTES

There were no minutes to approve.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Robert Turner said the Commission has spent the last seven months deliberating on the existing charter. He recently spoke to Bob Batson, Albany Law School, on assisting the Charter Commission in drafting a charter. He suggested this evening that the Commission start coming to some consensus on the size of the Council, length of terms, election methods, etc.

Barbara Thomas suggested discussing wards/districts. She said it would be a big change from what the City currently has. She said, though, that mapping out districts, seemed daunting. She said it could be quite cumbersome and complicated. She suggested leaving wards/districts to the next Charter Commission.

Pat Kane suggested that there should be a lot of thought given to "kicking the can" on wards/districts, before leaving it to the next Commission.

Robert Turner quoted from James Madison saying, "government should be large enough to guard against the cabals of a few; small enough to guard against the confusion of a multitude." He said there is no optimal size for a Council. He pointed out that Newton, MA, has 24 on its Council. Generally, though, most have between five and nine.

Size of Council: Laura Chodos suggested seven members on the Council. Gordon Boyd thought that nine might be a bit large. Jeff Altamari asked if the two supervisors should be voting members on the Council. After some discussion, there was consensus on seven members on the Council.

Length of Term: Pat Kane suggested four year staggered terms. Jeff Altamari said two year terms were difficult. Council members often spend one year governing and one year campaigning. Devin Dal Pos said the length of term might depend on what form this Commission proposes. Robert Turner supported four year terms. Gordon Boyd said if there are four year terms they should be staggered. He also pointed out that Congress has two year terms. Laura Chodos said with four year terms, Council members could focus more on good governing. Barbara Thomas asked how a strong Mayor would fit on the Council. Gordon Boyd said the Mayor would be elected. He said a Council President would be part of the Council and selected by the Council. Robert Kuczynski pointed out that if there are "at large" positions, there are a lot of doors that would need to be knocked on. He pointed out that with two year terms, Council members are essentially "recalled". The survey of the City employees needs to be considered in this discussion. He said it was likely that most residents really don't know what is going on inside City Hall, therefore, the opportunity to vote Council members in our out every two years may or may not be very important. He said he could go either way on the form of government, but he preferred four year terms. He also pointed out that with two year terms, often Council members do not want to take up "hot button" issues, because it would be fresh in voters' minds. Devin Dal Pos said because of the dysfunction in City Hall, he leaned towards two year terms. Robert Kuczynski said if 50 people show up to a Council meeting on a particular issue, often that will sway Council members' voting position. Jeff Altamari said that possibly with four year terms, there would be more people likely to run. Laura Chodos asked

about the County Supervisor positions, noting that they are two year terms. Pat Kane said he had spoken to the Saratoga County Board of Elections and Supervisors could be voting members of the Council. Devin Dal Pos said it could be helpful to actually have a voting member of the Council on the Saratoga County Board -- noting there would be a little more clout in that person's vote. Gordon Boyd said we could change the language in the Charter for the Supervisor positions to be four year terms. There was consensus on four year terms.

Term Limits: Devin Dal Pos asked about term limits. Robert Turner said that term limits are popular. He said many are three times. Gordon Boyd said that perhaps there should be some discussion on the prohibition of running for the same position more than three times. Robert Turner said that we can draft into the language whatever we would like. Gordon Boyd pointed out that New York City has term limits. Often, though, after their time is up, they move on to running for higher office. He said though that he had a philosophical problem in not being able to vote for someone who is doing a good job. Devin Dal Pos said he was good with three, four year terms. He said that we need new thoughts and ideas. Jeff Altamari pointed out that the average length of time a CEO serves in a position is seven years. Robert Turner asked what do we believe the voters want and should be getting some feedback on it. Jeff Altamari said we should make the decision. Gordon Boyd said there needed to be language that if a person was appointed to fill a position, that would not count against the three, four year terms. There was consensus on three, four term terms as the maximum.

(Minita Sanghvi arrived: 7:40 p.m.)

Wards/Districts: Barbara Thomas said if we have wards/districts, there needs to be language that if the elected official moves out of the ward/district, they forfeit their seat. Robert Turner said the ward/district system changes the dynamics of voters. He said this is a rather large City and it is difficult for one person who is running to knock on all of the doors. However, in a ward/district, it would be much easier. It would force voters to pay a little more attention to the local races. Barbara Thomas said running for office in a ward/district would likely be less expensive. Minita Sanghvi said having wards allows for greater representation on neighborhood issues. Robert Turner said the at large positions with four year terms would give those individuals four years to achieve name recognition across the City. Gordon Boyd agreed that with the ward/district system, it was more likely that neighborhood issues would be addressed. Devin Dal Pos said it would force wards/districts to find a candidate to represent them. There was agreement that the term "district" rather than "ward" would be used. Pat Kane brought up that many years ago it was east side vs. west side and it took many years for that line of thought to diminish. Robert Turner said often now, though, elected officials do not attend local events. If there are districts, they would be far more likely to show up to events. Laura Chodos suggested that the election map be used to develop the districts. Gordon Boyd said the election maps are drawn so there are about 1,000 voters in each district. He said years ago, the east side vs. the west side came from the economic disparity. He said most of that distinction has evaporated. Barbara Thomas said under the district system, people who want to run for office would not have to be "experts" in one the areas, i.e., DPS, DPW, Finance or Accounts. She asked if we are trying to put together the "ideal" charter or one that might pass. Devin Dal Pos said more than 50 percent of the voters are new voters here. They have already experienced other forms of government. Minita Sanghvi said at one of the prior meetings, one of the invitees said that in some cases, it is more difficult to get people to run for district seats. Robert Turner believed that the district system will force voters to find a candidate. Minita Sanghvi said that could be so, but we need to address everything here before coming to a decision. Devin Dal

Pos said there is an argument now that residents can pick up the phone, call the Commissioner and get the job done. However, that argument works well with districts too.

(Matt Jones arrived: 8:15 p.m.)

Jeff Altamari said we need to keep this concise when presenting it to the public. Pat Kane said this will force political parties to find candidates. Laura Chodos asked if the Mayor would be "at large". Pat Kane said yes. Robert Turner said the Mayor and the two supervisors would be "at large". Pat Kane said under that suggestion, the highest ranking member of the Council would not be representing the City at the County level. Matt Jones said the district concept was intriguing. He said the major divisive issues that we have at the Council table now would be looked at differently with districts. He said having 50 people show up to a meeting would decrease their influence on a singular issue. It would be a whole new direction for the Council. Devin Dal Pos said there was nothing to prevent a special interest group from putting up a candidate for an "at large" position. Gordon Boyd said the level of compensation should be the same for all of the positions. He pointed out that the County currently pays \$18,000 for those seats. Robert Turner said if the County positions were voting members and we paid \$6,000 for 24 hours worth of work a week and then to add on the County work, it would need to be someone who was retired to fill the position. There was consensus to draft language on districts and "at large" positions.

Legislative Powers:

Gordon Boyd said that currently the Mayor makes appointments to the Boards. He said perhaps there should be shorter terms on those Boards. The land use boards have quite a bit of power and four year terms would seem consistent with the elected positions. Tony Izzo and Matthew Jones said there is state law on seven year terms for the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals. The terms on those Boards are staggered with one falling off each year. Minita Sanghvi asked who represents the City if the Mayor is unable to act. Gordon Boyd said the Mayor would preside over the Council. Matthew Jones suggested that all appointments to the Board should be done in the same fashion. He pointed out that the City Center Authority requires Council approval. Robert Turner said it could turn into a political nightmare if appointments needed Council approval. Tony Izzo said he would need to research whether Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeal appointments could/should have Council approval. Robert Turner asked about appointment to judge positions. Matthew Jones said that was to fill a vacancy only.

Drafting: Robert Turner said once we get through these bigger issues and the Council has approved a contract with Bob Baston, he would meet with him on the drafting of the document. He said the contract for him to draft would be about \$10,000. The Commission will give Bob Baston general guidance on the document. Pat Kane said he would like to stay close to the model city charters that the Commission has reviewed. Robert Turner said Bob Baston has currently drafted seven charters and he is very willing to meet with the Commission. Jeff Altamari asked about removing items from the charter. Robert Turner said the best practice shows that charters should be short and concise. He said there are definitely some boiler plate matters that will need to be included. Pat Kane said some of the language in the existing charter can go into City Code.

Misc.: Pat Kane distributed information to Commission members asking that they review and bring it to the next meeting. Gordon Boyd said we need to think about whether there should be

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language on prohibition from holding another office in the City. Pat Kane said we need to think about whether the charter should be reviewed every ten years.

Next Meeting: Robert Turner said the Commission is scheduled to meet next Thursday where we will discuss the concepts of City Manager vs. Mayor or some other hybrid. He said there are many hybrids used throughout the country. He said he would do a little research on those.

ADJOURNMENT

Laura Chodos moved and Minita Sanghvi seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 p.m. Ayes all. There being no further business, Robert Turner adjourned the meeting at 9:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine A. Moran
Clerk

Approved: January 19, 2017