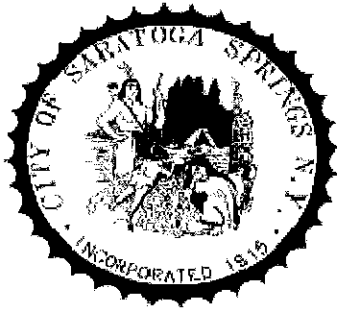


City of Saratoga Springs Charter Review Commission  
Tuesday, June 13, 2017



June 13, 2017  
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS  
Charter Review Commission  
City council Chambers  
7:00 PM

**CALL TO ORDER**

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**CHAIR REPORT**

**DISCUSSION OF MAY 30 OUTREACH MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT EDUCATION EFFORTS**

**DISCUSSION OF OUTREACH EDUCATION MATERIAL**

**ADJOURN**



June 13, 2017  
CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS  
Charter Review Commission  
City Council Chambers  
7:00 PM

PRESENT: Ann Casey Bullock  
Gordon Boyd  
Laura Chodos  
Matthew Jones  
Pat Kane  
BK Keramati  
Barbara Thomas  
Robert Turner

ABSENT: Jeff Altamari  
Devin Dal Pos  
Elio DelSette  
Robert Kuczynski  
Mike Los  
Minita Sanghvi  
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 7:03 p.m.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chairman Robert Turner opened the public comment period.

Joy King, 6 Marion Avenue said the May 30 workshop was great; she attended in the morning and the evening. She thought it was money well spent. It worked out better as a public workshop than if it had remained a special election. She thanked the charter commission for their efforts.

There being no one else wishing to speak, Chairman Robert Turner closed the public comment period at 7:04 p.m.

### **MINUTES**

**Ann Bullock moved and BK Keramati seconded to accept the minutes of the May 23 Charter Commission meeting. Ayes all.**

### **CHAIR REPORT**

Robert Turner said he had nothing particular to report.

### **DISCUSSION OF MAY 30 OUTREACH MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT EDUCATION EFFORTS**

Ann Bullock credited and thanked Richard Sellers for pointing out a difference between audits that was stated incorrectly in the draft charter. It has since been corrected.

Laura Chodos said she enjoyed the public workshop; it was a great opportunity for those who came to speak to the members of the Commission. It was a tremendous commitment, but very important.

Barb Thomas thanked Gordon Boyd for the idea of the public outreach workshop. She noted that the people that came were each at different phases of understanding the process and they seem to have gotten their questions answered. She said the City Manager from Watertown did a great job and was very informative.

Gordon Boyd said it was a great format and worked out for the general public. He said it exceeded his expectations because it gave each member of the Commission an opportunity to speak with the general public on this Charter. He said it was apparent that discussions over the months have infused the Commission members with more knowledge than they realized and it showed with the capability exhibited by each member to answer the questions from the public.

Matt Jones said he was designated Audio-visual guy and although he was only there thirty minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening, he noticed it was well attended. He commended the organizers.

Robert Turner said that with each City Manager he meets, he walks away more impressed by the role. He commented that the City Manager of Watertown was focused on driving costs down and when confronted with Council members that are proposing high end projects, she costs out the proposal for a subtle taste of reality instead of being confrontational which is a great approach.

Gordon Boyd said the City Manager of Watertown is humble, and approaches the job with a collaborative mentality. He said the way she manages the city without being heavy on dominating others or being authoritative and without involving politics is refreshing to him and would be a great gift to this city. Robert Turner said he has asked every City Manager he meets about their politics and whether they appoint their relatives and friends or people as favors and

they just do not go there. It is hard for Saratoga Springs residents to envision a world without politics or cronyism. He stated that the other thing he took away from that public forum is that the message is most persuasive when there are a variety of voices; having the different voices will be the cornerstone of what we do.

Pat Kane said Watertown and Saratoga Springs have similarities but Watertown does not have the strong economic base that Saratoga Springs has, yet their bond rating is outstanding. They manage every dollar that comes in the door. The biggest challenge in Watertown is the opioid epidemic; so much so that they train employees for PTSSO symptoms and to know and understand the signs and characteristics of opioid abuse.

Gordon Boyd said that something like a local opioid addiction is a priority that should be taken on without political regard or concern.

Robert Turner said that concerns such as opioid epidemics do not fall directly into anyone's wheelhouse. Locally a particular judge felt it was a collective societal issue that should be dealt with. He noted that in Watertown one of the Councilmen was particularly focused on the issue of run-down rental properties and the City Manager's reaction was to assign certain staff to work on the issue.

Matt Jones noted that he is concerned that we are trading off the local accountability of the current system of government with blind faith in a City Manager.

Barbara Thomas stated that you are not locked in forever; if one City Manager does not work out, someone else can be hired; any one of the Council members could be called because they are elected by the public and they must be responsive to the public.

Matt Jones stated that he was referring to a member of the public getting in touch with a decision maker. He is not sure if we could return to the Commission form of government once we change.

Pat Kane said that historically no city that left the Commission form of government has ever gone back to that form.

Tony Izzo said that once the new form has passed, you have to wait for it to take effect before you can initiate any further change.

BK Keramati said he recalls asking the city Manager of Batavia about responsiveness to inquiries from the public and he responded that on their website there is a phone number and they guarantee a response within 24 hours. He is impressed that you can find out the locations of the best practices of City Managers working with people very easily by searching the web. He feels people will get responses that actually focus on the question or the issue at hand without political slant.

Matt Jones said the reason there are 15 members of this Charter Commission is that each brings a different experience to the table; his experience with leadership has not been as successful as others. Robert Turner said that on the Watertown website, there are hotlines for issues such as water, sewer, trees and streets. Here, no one is really certain whom to call. Gordon Boyd's concern is that not every question falls neatly into a single department within the

City's current system. Matt Jones said these are resolvable issues and they are fixable within the current charter, especially the segregation issues.

Ann Bullock pointed out that in Saratoga Springs, it took a judge to put a consortium together; we do not have that flexibility within our current system to resolve such issues internally; it usually results in an ad-hoc solution. What we are hoping with the new form is to have the consortium built in; you do not have to know who to call just call one of the leaders or call the City Manager.

Pat Kane said that many former leaders have testified before this Commission that people seldom seemed to know who in this current form of government is responsible for what and they had no idea of the level of the responsibility of each Commissioner. After listening to people from City Hall, the Commission learned that confusion of visitors and clients is common.

### **DISCUSSION OF VOTER OUTREACH EDUCATION MATERIAL**

Robert Turner suggested having members of the Commission choose particular topics and write letters to the newspapers on that subject.

There was discussion on the next meetings and where they should be held. Robert Turner said he is glad that the meetings are scheduled but the City Council room is strange and he prefers doing a travelling road show. Barbara Thomas said the Commission must adopt a final version of the Charter. Pat Kane said that the public should know where the Commission is meeting. BK Keramati noted that once the Commission has voted on the final version of the Charter, the remaining meetings are all public outreach.

Matt Jones reminded the Commission that the financial impact statement, a rationale document and a document regarding transition are all required.

Tony Izzo confirmed that there is a statutory requirement for the explanation, the fiscal impact and the transition description; section 36 states that the charter itself, financial impact and some sort of rationale document as to why we changed what we changed is required for submission to the Board of Elections.

Gordon Boyd asked if the Commission is required to approve each measure at once.

Tony Izzo responded that the only hard deadline is 62 days before the election. The Commission can approve items that are to be submitted one at a time or all at once.

Matt Jones advised that the Commission should get those documents in order and circulate them; it is tricky to get all of the Commission in the same room at the same time. This should be done as soon as possible.

Tony Izzo stated that in 2001, all were present except one person who voted by telephone. However, if this Commission wants to avoid any questions about whether someone's vote counts, get them all physically in the same room.

Laura Chodos asked if the Commission could plan to focus on one item and advertise it, also add a formal public forum at least once or twice more.

Robert Turner said he likes the idea of a thematic approach. Pat Kane said he spoke with Beth Wurtmann so she can video people and put it on the web. He said that members of the Commission could sit in their neighborhoods and educate people but if they represent the Commission, they are an educator only and never an advocate. He recommends a partnership of two to three members working together. He said that the Outreach Committee will be putting bags together for members to bring with them when they are educating a neighborhood. He recommended using the Recreation Center and other public places but those dates and times must get on the calendar.

Gordon Boyd said that those that can do these education events should team up and schedule them as soon as possible. Pat Kane said there are four more City Managers that are going to come to public forums. Gordon Boyd suggested that large public forums be held after Labor Day. Robert Turner reminded the Outreach Committee to use tools such as Look TV and local newspapers as much as possible. Laura Chodos advised that the Outreach Committee members should get documents together and set up a schedule for public forums. BK Keramati said he wanted to have an event in his neighborhood where he would invite people to his home from a two to three block radius. He asked if the Commission could publish a pocket-sized charter to distribute to the public. Laura Chodos mentioned that one contract for publishing that the Outreach Committee considered contained very competitive pricing.

Pat Kane said that the Commission's webpage should be more vibrant and more interactive and it should be easier to find things. Barbara Thomas said that one of the improvements to the webpage must be to make it easier for the Commission to post things. Pat Kane said that improvements would be under \$1,000 and he has left messages regarding approved vendors. He hopes to have a re-design done by the end of July. Both Robert Turner and Pat Kane agreed that the goal is to get something in the news every week; little blurbs, no opinions, just informational tidbits. With names attached, people will be more likely to reach out to individual members of the Commission. We want to use Op-eds, letters, local radio, Channel 9, and Look TV. There are publications forthcoming; copies of the charter should be published and distributed, fact sheets, flyers, etc. Beth Wurtmann is unable to come to meetings but she is still very engaged with the publicity side of this.

Laura Chodos advised getting publicity and education tools in place as soon as possible because things will get crazy in the fall. Pat Kane agreed, adding that it is necessary to think outside the box and have a summary that can be tweaked. Robert Turner said he tried to come up with a one-page sheet on what the voters need to know and it is difficult so he would like Commission members to come up with bullet items, brief bullet points.

Gordon Boyd said he has a two to three page summary using a legislative memorandum style he used to do in Albany. He dealt with most sections and why the changes were made and the general summary is on the back. He noted that the statutory requirements of a fiscal statement, the charter itself and the rationale are very important and flyers created subsequent to those can be distillations of those required documents.

Pat Kane commented that going door to door is fun and Commission members should go with a couple of people not only for safety but for discussion purposes. He recommends picking a Saturday or Sunday in October; it is appropriate to get out into the neighborhoods. He suggested that Commission members wear bright buttons stating "Ask me about the Charter" to start the education process.

Ann Bullock reminded the Commission that constituency that should not be overlooked include the residents of Stonequist, the Embury Apartments, the Terraces, and Woodlawn Commons.

Gordon Boyd suggested putting the fiscal impact memo and the rationale/justification into one document, accompanied by the Charter because these three items comprise the education component. Discussion followed on the formats of publications and distribution, including having publications at each polling place. Robert Turner said the Commission must be very pragmatic about the budget; less is more. He mentioned receiving the Facts for Voters documents from 1968 and 2001 which provide examples that the Commission might want to consider when developing their fact sheet.

Tony Izzo cautioned the Commission that some of the older fact sheets were developed prior to legal opinions issued more recently regarding advocacy versus education; there are more detailed requirements and rules today. He noted there were two fact sheets issued in 2001.

Robert Turner commented that some of the arguments stated in the 1960 and 1968 documents could have been written today.

Gordon Boyd emphasized that first and foremost the Commission must meet their statutory requirements and they need to vote on the official Charter document and have it available to the public with the required documents as soon as possible. Regarding format, he said to wait for a response from the publishers. He does not want to overwhelm people with other issues. He wants the documents put out to the public in a way that is accessible to everyone. He would like to consider a way to make it accessible to those that are deaf and/or blind as well.

BK Keramati asked if the Commission is considering mailing the large document to the 10,000 plus households in the City of Saratoga Springs. He was thinking about having a summary that includes information on how people could obtain a full copy of the documents, the whole package. There was a discussion on cost and Barb Thomas said that bulk mailing up to one ounce for not-for-profits is \$.35 each. Gordon Boyd asked if the Commission could legally use the City's bulk mailing and it was mentioned among the Commission that there have been previous issues regarding bulk mailing by a past City Charter Commission so research is necessary.

Barbara Thomas recommended getting a summary piece to every household. Gordon Boyd said that a tight summary is almost three pages and he tried to be objective and brief. Barbara Thomas said she was thinking about a brief list of changes, an outline. Gordon Boyd suggested asking a member of the League of Woman Voters whether it is best to send out less information or more information.

### **MAYOR AND COUNCIL SALARIES**

Robert Turner advised that the salary of the Mayor and Council members be set prior to voting on the Charter. The numbers he is contemplating are \$14,500 for City Council members and \$40,000 for the Mayor.

Matt Jones stated that those numbers make sense especially since the proposed Council will have fewer duties than the current Council.

Pat Kane advised that if an employee works more than 1,000 hours they must be covered by a health plan. Gordon Boyd noted that there will be an average of two meetings per month which is 48 per year at around three hours each and even with the addition of committee meetings it would be difficult for the Council members to meet the 1,000 hours criteria. Gordon Boyd said that it is a state requirement to offer retirement so tighter language is necessary. We must be sure that what is proposed regarding salary and benefits or a lack of benefits is something that can be done legally.

Matt Jones stated that although he has issues with the notion of requiring a City Manager to do a job that five Deputies, several with assistants, are doing now, he supports those numbers.

Robert Turner said that the Commission is following the footprints left by the 2000-2001 Charter Commission making it more professional. He advised that the five years of experience and the education requirements established by the Commission for the City Manager are stringent and the City Manager cannot be involved in partisan politics so comparison to the current Deputies and their functions is irrelevant.

BK Keramati said there is a lot of duplication in the current system. The streamlining of the current structure set in place by the proposed Charter will eliminate many of the current issues.

Matt Jones said he concerned with the fact that there is no support to the City Manager listed in the proposed Charter. Gordon Boyd explained that in January of 2020 there will be funds available to add staff if it is deemed necessary. Barbara Thomas reminded the Commission that most City Managers want a Director of Personnel, and a finance director. Pat Kane said that there are currently Directors in City hall and the interview of the Director of Finance revealed that 50% of their time is spent in politics and this proposal will eliminate that.

### **MEETING SCHEDULE**

The Commission discussed changing the June meeting dates because the challenge is to have the entire Commission available to vote on the final draft of the Charter. They agreed that the next meeting should be held on Monday, June 26. Robert Turner said he will determine where the meeting would be held since the Zoning Board will be in the City Council room and he will email everyone accordingly.

Gordon Boyd reminded the Commission that someone needs to schedule a meeting with someone from the City's Accounts Department and draft a ballot proposition.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chairman Turner opened the second public comment period at 8:55 p.m.

Joy King, 6 Marion Avenue, Saratoga Springs said that \$14,500 is a good salary for Council members. She is unclear about the salary and benefits of the Mayor and City Manager.

Gordon Boyd clarified that the Mayor would receive health care benefits because the assumption is that the Mayor would work more than 1,000 hours. He explained that in addition to health care benefits, the City Manager's salary is \$125,000 per year; there would be eventual raises.



Joy King said that in previous years there were two copies of the charter document available at each district to allow the voter to be able to look at the whole draft and they could also refer to the original charter as well. She suggested that the Commission investigate the possibility of having a smaller more condensed version with larger print. She asked the Commission to consider providing information in Spanish since there are a lot of Spanish speaking people in this community. She noted that in District 14, there are many people that do not speak English very well.

Barbara Thomas wondered if the Commission could get their final Charter translated automatically.

Joy King said that instead of a three page summary, she prefers a palm card, possibly one that lists main points of change because it is preferable when walking through districts. In regards to house parties, Joy King said that in order to educate the public, the Commission should consider holding more workshops using venues such as the Recreation Center, Mount Olivet Church, the Public Library, the Wilton Elks Lodge, the Principessa Elena and the VFW, all of which are fairly central to particular voting districts.

Joy King implored the Commission not to change the current meeting schedule because Tuesdays in the City Council room work out well; it is hard to hear in the Music Hall and people know the schedule now so she prefers consistency with the meetings. She asked the Commission to include each Charter person and their email address when producing literature. She said that regarding bulk mailing, pre-sorted mail is cheaper, although you will have to get the trays.

Joy King commented that it is better to educate a large group all at once and face to face is the best way to do that; the key to everything is to explain both sides in order for the public to have enough information to make the best decision.

Seeing that no one else wished to speak, Chairman Turner closed the public comment period at 8:58 p.m.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Matthew Jones moved and BK Keramati seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m. Ayes all. There being no further business, Chairman Robert Turner adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Wagner  
Clerk

Approved: 8/22/2017