



Charter Review Commission Minutes

Stow City Hall Boards and Commissions Room, Thursday, February 19, 2015, 5:30 p.m.

Members Present: Andrea Denton, Kelly Johnson, Robin Kory, John Long, Tim Schofield, Annal Vyas, and Mary Botts

Members Absent: Nicole Walker

Also Present: Mayor Sara Drew, Ken Barnhart, Parks and Recreation Department, and Jeff Saunders, Stow Sentry

Meeting called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Mayor Drew

Mayor Drew began with welcoming the commission and thanking them for serving on the Charter Review Commission. The Commission members introduced themselves and told a little about themselves to the other members.

The Mayor proceeded to Swear-In the New Charter Review Members.

Mayor Drew stated as you know, these are public and open meetings. She introduced Jeff Saunders from the Stow Sentry, who may be attending most of the meetings. She also introduced Ken Barnhart, who works for the Parks and Recreation Department. Mayor Drew said she was sure there will be other people coming to the meetings at different times. Mary Botts is your main resource person who has done this before so she knows how this goes and will keep you on track. If for some reason Mary cannot be here or there is a scheduling conflict for her for any reason, Vicki Huff from my office will be the backup. I am sure that at some point, you have talked to Vicki when you were getting applications during that process.

Mayor Drew stated as I have talked to all of you, we have to adhere, obviously, to public notifications for meeting times and places and dates because it is a public meeting so the public has to have enough advance notice, and Mary can help you with that, to be able to attend if they want, but beyond that, it is entirely up to all of you when you meet. I don't care if it is 7:30 in the morning, 7:30 at night, it doesn't matter what day of the week it is, it doesn't matter. We do need to have you meet here at City Hall, I think that is prescribed for Charter Review. You have to meet at City Hall, but beyond that, whatever works for all of you works for us and it will may prove easier to have a consistent schedule like Wednesday at 5:30 or whatever works, there is nothing that says you have to do that so you guys can talk amongst yourselves and figure out what works, and if you want to try something and then maybe change. There is nothing that says you can't do a Saturday morning if you are so inclined or whatever. We just have to have enough advanced notice.

With that said, I know Mary had put discussion of meeting dates and then the election of a Chair and Vice Chair, but maybe what I will do is reverse that order and see if we have any members who would like to serve as the Chair who can help lead the discussion about meeting times and places. Is there anyone who would like to volunteer to serve as Chair? Your primary responsibilities are running the meeting and hoping to keep discussion on track which is essential because I don't want you guys here for ten hours every night. I would encourage you to set a goal for how long you want the meetings to be and then that Chair can have the privilege of steering conversation and moving things along. Also the Chair will be essential in helping when you have people come in that you invite, or who come to make public comments, helping steer that conversation along and winnowing down the points of discussion. In the past, there have been times when they get stuck on one topic and they spend a really long amount of time on that and then kind of end up feeling like they short changed the other topics they wanted to discuss.

Robin Kory agreed to act as Chairperson. A vote was taken and Robin Kory was voted in 6-0. (One member absent).

Robin Kory then asked for volunteer for Vice Chair. Annal Vyas agreed to be Vice Chair. A vote was taken and Annal Vyas was voted in 6-0. (One member absent).

Mayor Drew asked if Ms. Kory would like Mary Botts to talk about her previous experience with how previous Charter Review Commissions have organized. Ms. Botts said I think you received a Charter Review book that I sent you. A lot of times we will take one whole chapter and maybe go over it. The other thing we do is send an invitation out to all Council Members to come in and testify. We usually invite two people a meeting. We invite all the department heads, other commission members and they come in and talk about what concerns the Charter. We open it to the public if they want to come in and speak. They come in and give their opinion on the Charter. We leave a little time in case someone from the public comes in and wants to speak.

Mayor Drew said one thing that Mary is so helpful with, not only because of her tenure with Charter Review Commissions but her tenure with the City, is as you start looking through the different chapters, Mary will be a great resource of "yes, here is what has happened in previous Charter Review Commissions with this issue." It doesn't mean by any means that you shouldn't consider something if it has been discussed before, even put on the ballot before, but Mary is a great resource, every City has that resource that can tell you what you did fifteen years ago and what happened then. Mary is a great resource for that so as you start working some issues, I can guarantee there are some things that have come up almost every Charter Review Commission. Terms limits is one that has been on the ballot a couple of different times, a couple of different ways, so Mary is a great resource for that. Mary said as you start thinking about it, we start doing a chart and you can look back and say, okay, that is not something we are really concerned about but as you talk, we do charts and so you can say, well these are the important ones because you don't want twenty on the ballot. I send out weekly minutes so we can go back and see what was previously discussed.

Mayor Drew said remember that anything that you end up finalizing as a recommendation goes to City Council and then is put on the ballot for the voters to vote

on in the November election. I think one year there were eight or ten items. There are pros and cons to that. More traditionally, Charter Review Commissions have tried to stick with a few. Ms. Denton had a question about that. Can the Council veto what we recommend to go on a ballot or do they actually decide that it goes on the ballot? Mayor Drew said last time Charter Review Commission met, the Law Director at that time issued a ruling to Council that they do not have the authority to veto what goes on the ballot. Now, technically, we have a new Law Director, but nonetheless, at least that time, that was a precedent that was set and I guess I would also answer that you guys are going to spend so much time and effort vetting these ideas that I think Council respects the fact that you will have spent months examining these issues. It is not on a whim that you are going to put forth some crazy idea and so I think Council is traditionally very respectful of that.

Mr. Schofield said so then by the time it gets to Council, whatever we discussed through our meetings, that stands. They don't filter it again. Mayor Drew said they have to vote on it and they will discuss it in Council but technically, per the ruling five years ago, it is more about formality because Council, by law, has to approve anything that goes on the ballot unless it is a Citizen's Initiative through petitions and even then, I think technically has to go to Council. The Law Director Amber Zibritosky, who I am sure you will meet through this process if you don't already know her, will take your final recommendations and put them into the proper wording for legislation and then it goes to the Board of Elections and then the Board of Elections makes some final decisions on the wording that goes on the ballot and they have certain parameters set by the State. For example, the wording of any initiative on the ballot can't be too lengthy or confusing. It needs to clearly state what the issue is, word it in such a manner that the typical voter is going to understand what their vote is for, so they will scrutinize it at the Board of Elections and occasionally they will send something back for a little minor change, but you guys don't have to be involved in that stage of it.

Mr. Long said so any changes or approvals that we make are voted on. Mayor Drew said your final recommendations. Mayor Drew said and just to be completely transparent, you don't have to put forward any recommendations, you could all decide the Charter is absolutely 100% perfect the way it is and we have no changes to recommend. I don't think that has ever happened but just so you know, you are not bound by any law or rule that you have to put forth a recommendation or you have to put forth some minimum number. It is up to you to see what seems appropriate.

Mr. Schofield asked is there a benefit to see what other Charters have put out before. Ms. Botts said I can do that, get you other Charters from other cities. Mayor Drew said I will share with you that we are not the only Community in the area undergoing Charter Review this year. I know Cuyahoga Falls is, perhaps Kent, it is a pretty routine thing for most municipalities every five years is the average. There are a number of other communities in our area who are undergoing the process right now too.

Ms. Kory said so we can divide up the sections and review. The Mayor stated you could do it that way. You don't have to decide that tonight, you can think about it if you haven't had a chance to look at it yet. Mary can get you some resources and decide at your next meeting. The only thing we really have to have you do tonight, if at all

possible, is elect a Chair and Vice Chair, which we have done, and at least schedule the next meeting. If you have some idea of a framework that might work for you for future meetings, that would be good.

Ms. Kory asked what days would be good for everybody next week. Everyone agreed that Thursday at 5:30 p.m. would be good for next week. Mayor Drew said remember you don't have to meet weekly, that is entirely up to the commission. That is what they have done traditionally. You may find you want to meet every other week. You may find you want to meet, whatever works for you.

Mr. Vyas asked how long the meetings go to and Mary Botts said it averages around two hours but it all depended on the agenda for the day.

Mayor Drew said what may be of an advantage, if you are able to stick to at least Thursdays often, the second and fourth Thursday of every month is the City Council meeting and it typically starts, the Council meeting starts at 7:00, Committees often start between 5:30 and 6:30, depending on how many committees there are and what agendas there are so if you are going to be having council people in, it might be a convenient time to increase the likelihood that they will come in and meet with you.

Mayor Drew said Robin and Mary can work on the agenda ahead of time. Ms. Kory said she would like to discuss Chapters 1-6 at the next meeting.

Mayor Drew said she was very excited about the group gathered together tonight. She has gotten to know all of you through this process if I didn't know you before, and I think you are all going to gel together. We have a diverse group of people but I really want to emphasize that all of you are such nice reasonable people.

Mayor Drew said I will not traditionally be at meetings because I don't want to intrude so unless you invite me to testify, this will probably be the only time you see me here other than if I pop in to say hello.

There were no further comments or concerns. The next Charter Review Commission Meeting will be held Thursday, February 26th at 5:30 p.m. in the Boards and Commissions Room.

Meeting adjourned 6:02 p.m.

Mary Botts, Secretary

Robin Kory, Chairperson