

Snohomish County
Charter Review Commission
8th Floor Robert J. Drewel Building
Jackson Board Room
Wednesday, February 17, 2016
7:00 p.m.
MINUTES

PRESENT:

Chair Gregerson
Vice-Chair Terwilliger
Vice-Chair Miller
Commissioner Stanford
Commissioner Donner
Commissioner O'Donnell
Commissioner Kelly (via videoconference)
Commissioner Valentine
Commissioner Matthews
Commissioner Roulstone
Commissioner Koster
Commissioner Barton
Commissioner Chase
Commissioner Fior
Councilmember Ken Klein
Judge Beth Fraser
Judge Linda Krese
Debbie Eco, Council Clerk
Chris Roberts, Commission Analyst

Call to Order

Chair Gregerson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Flag Salute

Roll Call

Commissioner Liias absent. Commissioner Donner at 7:05 pm .

Guests:

1. Councilmember Ken Klein

Councilmember Klein recommended that as the Commissioners consider proposals to amend the Charter, they should consider the costs of the proposal, consider communities, and consider voters. He suggested that the Commissioners give the voters an opportunity to determine how they want their government operates rather than what individual Commissioners support.

Councilmember Klein suggested that the Commission should consider making the County non-partisan. He stated partisanship at the local level does not work. He stated that King County voters made their Council non-partisan. Non-partisan elections would improve voters choice, increase competition, makes government accountable, and improves partnerships between

the County and other governments.

Commissioners asked Councilmember Klein questions about the merits of his proposal. Commissioner Valentine expressed support for learning more about what King County did.

2. Judge Beth Fraser

Judge Fraser said she was the presiding judge of the South Division District Court. She stated that she did not have any proposals to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Matthews asked about the needs for law and justice in the County. Judge Fraser responded that there are lots of non-financial solutions available in the County and a great capacity to address these issues.

3. Judge Linda Krese

Judge Krese stated the Charter does not have a direct impact on the Superior Court. In the past, the Court requested that the duties of the Clerk be placed under the administrative direction of the Court. She stated that this year the Court is not going to move forward on the proposed change. She expressed agreement with Judge Fraser about the needs for law and justice in the County. Finally, she stated that criminal cases make up about 10% of the Court's docket.

Public Comments

There were no persons present wishing to provide public comment.

Approval of the Minutes: February 3, 2016

Commissioner Chase stated that the February 3 minutes should be corrected to show a discussion of placing the web form in Spanish.

Commissioner Chase moved that the minutes with the addition of the note that the Commission would like the form in Spanish to be approved. Commissioner Barton seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Report from Chair

Chair Gregerson stated that the Chris Roberts was hired as the Commission Analyst.

Chair Gregerson stated that corrections were made to the website and the web form and online. She also stated that she is finalizing a contract with an attorney for the Council.

Chair Gregerson informed the Commissioners that all of the documents are now available on the County server.

Business Items

1. Process for receiving Charter Amendment Proposal

Commissioner O'Donnell discussed a proposed process for reviewing a Charter Amendment proposal recommended by a committee comprised of Chair Gregerson and Commissioners O'Donnell, Matthews and Roulstone. The process they recommended would require five or more votes to receive further consideration and analysis by the Commission.

Commissioner Barton suggested that the Commission should reconsider all proposals before taking final action. Commissioner Valentine recommended a two-phase elimination process. She stated that in 2006 many of the final amendments referred to the voters were combinations of proposed amendments.

Commissioner Chase stated that she would prefer seven votes to move a proposal forward. Commissioner Matthews stated that five votes would indicate support of 1/3 of the Commission.

Commissioner Koster moved approval of the committee's recommendation. Commissioner Roulstone seconded the motion.

Commissioner Koster asked about the protocol for proposals received by members of the public.

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Roulstone moved that the issue of the placement of the issue of animal control within the county government be referred to the County Council for appropriate action. Commissioner Valentine seconded the motion.

Commissioner Matthews stated that the County Sheriff and County Auditor be informed of the Commission's action.

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Roulstone stated that there should be wording changes made to the auditor's proposal regarding districting changes.

Commissioner Terwilliger moved Proposal 2 for Districting Timeline and Procedures forward. Commissioner Koster seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Chase stated she would like the staff provide a brief analysis of proposals before moving a proposal forward. Chair Gregerson stated a brief assessment would make sense. Commissioner Koster wanted to know if the proposal was or was not related to the Charter. Vice Chair Miller stated that the Commissioners could do their own analysis.

Commissioners discussed when staff should start analysis of proposed amendments to the Charter.

Commissioner Valentine moved to explore the issue of abstentions by County Council members. Commissioner Fior seconded the motion.

Commissioners discussed whether the issue of abstentions should be left to the County Council, the value of transparency, and the frequency of abstentions.

Commissioners voted 10-4 in favor of the motion (Chair Gregerson, Commissioner Barton, Commissioner Chase and Commissioner Stanford in opposition).

2. Roundtable Discussion of Amendment Ideas

Commissioner Koster brought forward three proposals relating to the Office of Ombudsman, an evaluation of how ethics complaints are handled in the County, and an evaluation of how whistleblower complaints are handled in the County.

Commissioner O'Donnell stated that he liked the proposal to create an office of Ombudsman. He also expressed support for non-partisan elections and would like to know more about how King County's process works.

Commissioner Valentine stated that she ran on the issue of transparency. She expressed a desire to see regularly scheduled County Council meetings in the evenings, on weekends, and in the Council districts.

Vice Chair Terwilliger informed the Commission that he sent an email to the Commission earlier in the day about proposed amendments to the Charter. He spoke about changing the age of eligibility in the County from 21 to 18 and the three year residency requirement to hold elected office. He stated that the Commission should evaluate whether the Office of Performance Auditor should remain in the Charter and that the Council should have more time to evaluate the budget.

Commissioner Barton stated his support for non-partisan elections and to expand the Council from five to seven members. He questioned whether the mission of the performance auditor was being fulfilled.

Commissioner Matthews expressed support evaluating non-partisan elections and performance audits. He stated that there are elements in the Charter which are glaringly in error. Commissioner Koster stated the Council should move to using biennial budgets.

Commissioner Fior proposed the Commission delete any gendered language in the Charter. She expressed support for evaluating the increasing the number of County Council members.

Commissioner Stanford supported moving forward on evaluating additional councilmembers, the role of performance auditor, and gender-neutral language in the Charter.

Commissioner Chase stated that people should be included in the process. She stated her support of moving to a seven member Council and opposition to non-partisan elections.

Vice Chair Miller spoke in favor of partisan elections and in opposition to term limits. He stated that there are only two African-Americans serving in elected positions in Snohomish County.

Chair Gregerson stated she was open to moving from five to seven councilmembers and opposition to non-partisan elections. She expressed interest in evaluating biannual budgets and the performance auditor.

Commissioner Kelly wanted to see how people can improve trust in government. She suggested the Commission should consider night meetings and evaluate the lack of representation in unincorporated areas of the County. She stated she would like more information about non-partisan elections.

Commissioner Donner stated that most voters vote on name recognition. He expressed support for term limits and opposition to expanding the Council.

Commissioner Roulstone stated that he would like to see an ordinance repealed with the passage of a new ordinance. Vice Chair Terwilliger suggested that all ordinances have a sunset

date.

Commissioners expressed a desire to understand the fiscal costs associated with Charter changes before taking final action.

Commissioner Chase moved to move forward the discussion of the size of the County Council from five to seven members and ask the staff to do further review. Commissioner Fior seconded the motion.

The motion passed 10-3.

Commissioner Valentine moved to explore how we can tighten the language and be effective at having biennial budgets for Snohomish County in the Charter. Seconded by Commissioner Matthews.

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Koster moved to explore creating the office of the ombudsman in the Charter. Commissioner Chase seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Terwilliger moved to move forward the issue of the performance audit role and look at the King County model. Commissioner Donner seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

New Business

Vice Chair Miller stated that the March 16th meeting will be at Marysville City Hall.

Commissioner Chase asked about outreach for district meetings. Chair Gregerson asked the Commissioners to help with finding the right media outlets for outreach and publicity. Vice Chair Miller and Fior volunteered to help with outreach.

Chair Gregerson stated the staff will collect public disclosure certificates.

Adjournment

With no further business, Chair Gregerson adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.