

Minutes Of The Escambia County Charter Commission Meeting
Held April 24, 2003 - 5:30 p.m.
Escambia County Courthouse – Third Floor
(5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.)
(Thirteenth Meeting)

Members

Present: M. J. Menge, Chair
Rita A. Riffel, Vice Chairman
Charles F. Beall, Jr
Johnny W. Blackmon
Le Roy Boyd
Barbara Forehand “Bobbie” Brown
Laurel Dick
Elbert Jones, Jr.

Denis McKinnon, Jr.
Frank Montenes
E. P. “Ted” Nickinson, Jr.
Lucy Rentz
Phyllis D. Sims
Lamar Smith
Garrett W. Walton

AGENDA NUMBER

1. Call to order - Chairman Menge at 5:30p.m.
2. Approval of the Agenda.

Motioned by Mr. Montenes and seconded by Mr. Jones, to approve the agenda, motion carried 12-0, with Mr. Beall, Ms. Brown, and Ms. Rentz arriving late.

3. Introductory Statement regarding public input meetings.

Chairman Menge addressed the public on what the Charter Commission has been working on since its first meeting on November 14, 2003. Mr. Menge gave some background on what has been occurring during the meetings, (i.e. hearing from various County department heads, past and present County Commissioners, County Administrators, Constitutional Officers, City of Pensacola officials, various regulatory agencies, and Kurt Spitzer, a consultant on charter government). In the process of hearing from all of these officials the Commission has been provided with voluminous materials to review in order to further expand their knowledge of how Escambia County functions. Among these materials were copies of all the charters that have been adopted in the State of Florida. The State of Florida currently has nineteen counties under charter government.

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The Charter Commission was tasked with two items to complete:

- 1) To conduct a comprehensive study of the operation of county government and of the ways in which the conduct of county government might be improved or reorganized, and
- 2) Based on the study, to draft and present to the Board of County Commissioners a proposed charter on which the Board will cause a public referendum election to be held.

The Commission is now in the public input phase of the work process. There will be eight public input meetings at which the Commission desires to hear from the public regarding the provisions that should be included in the Charter.

After the public input phase, the charter will be drafted and presented at a series of public hearings. The Commission intends to complete its work and submit the completed charter to the Board of County Commissioners in time for the Charter to be placed on the March 2004 ballot. Mr. Menge is asking the public to address the Commission on the topics that are scheduled for each particular meeting. Copies of the public input pamphlet were made available to all who attended, people were invited to read the pamphlet and address the Commission on the questions listed or discuss what they might feel is pertinent. Written opinions can be submitted to the Whitman Center.

4. & 5. Input from the public on the topics of “Structure or Form of County Government” and “The Board of County Commissioners.”

Twelve people addressed the Commission. Their statements are as follows:

- 1) Joseph Brown – Stated he is opposed to charter, unless it incorporates the safeguards of the U. S. Constitution.
- 2) Admiral Timothy Wright – Stated that the structure of the charter document is very critical. Escambia County needs a set of checks and balances and a broad vision for the future. In response to the questions Admiral Wright had the following suggestions: County manager form of government, a nine member board with at least two at-large members, significantly reduce salaries, the BCC should be a Legislative body setting policy, shared office space for Commissioners and an administrative support pool, BCC to appoint a successor in case of a vacancy, non-interference clause, and four year terms.
- 3) Byron Keesler – Stated he has not decided if Charter Government is good or bad. He would like to see a two term limit set in place by the charter.

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- 4) Charles Fairchild – He would like to see single member districts with the addition of at-large representation and take the number of Commissioners to ten. He would also like to see a president of the County Commission, non-partisan elections, and well-defined term limits, a nominal salary, legislative setting body, shared office space, vacancies to be filled by the governor, a non-interference clause, and two-year non-staggered terms.
- 5) Sharon Barnett – Stated she prefers an elected executive form, part-time Commissioner with a four year term, vacancies to be filled by the BCC, and she believes that race can not be the sole determinant of districting and the Commission should seek more legal advice on the race issue.
- 6) Michelle Schmidt – Stated she is concerned about having an elected Executive, need at-large representatives, eight years in office is plenty, \$20,000 per year salary, Legislative body with pooled resource staff, and the most important need of the citizens is an avenue of recourse besides waiting to vote someone out of office.
- 7) James Witt – He believes that if a charter had been in place, the corruption that occurred probably would not have happened. He believes in the county manager form, a legislative body that its purpose is policy setting and long-term planning, number of Commissioners should be expanded to 7 or 9 with two at large representatives, salaries and support staff should be reduced, partisan election, no separate offices, vacancies should be filled by special election, non-interference clause, and hopes that a document will be drafted that brings Escambia County into the 21st Century.
- 8) Janet DeLorge – Stated that she is speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters and wanted to express their views on the following: Home rule is best and allows for decisions to be made in a timely manner, BCC should be a policy making board, and favors the county manager form of government. She then wanted to express her personal opinion separately in the following statement: she prefers the five single member districts with the addition of two at-large members, this allows all the citizens to vote for two people to represent them, part time Commissioners, salaries reduced to \$30,000 per year, and hire an administrator to carry out the day to day duties of the county.
- 9) Rita Jones – Favors County Manager form of government. If Charter were to provide for elected Executive, we would encounter vote dilution problems. She supports single member districts. Stated she prefers no more than ten Commissioners, make the BCC a policy

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making board, non-partisan, favors term limits, four year terms, lower salaries, no separate offices, shared secretarial pool, vacancies to be filled by BCC, and a non-interference clause. She commented that being a Commissioner is a service not a job. She believes charter government is positive, but the voters need to be given a choice of what is to go into the document.

- 10) Rhett Anderson – Stated he likes the way the City of Pensacola is structured but prefers the County Chairman/Administrator form of government; he would support seven members, non-partisan, salary needs to be lowered, board needs to be a legislative body, non-interference clause, no separate offices, vacancies need to be filled locally, and staggered four year terms. Opposed to term limits.
- 11) Robert Hudson – Stated he prefers the current representation and believes that charter government leads to higher taxes and would only vote for charter if it specifically addressed the needs of the people in the north end of the county.
- 12) Henry Hicks Moore – Gave the Commission and people attending a handout. He believes that consolidating certain functions of the city and the county would save the taxpayers a good deal of money.

6. Approval of the minutes of the April 10, 2003 meeting.

Motioned by Mr. Jones and seconded by Mr. Dick to approve the minutes with the following corrections requested by Mr. Montenes, motion carried 15-0.

- 1) "Mr. Montenes requested that the language on page 5 Section B be modified to read as follows: The Charter Commission's legal advisory group, in response to a question asked by the Charter Commission, indicated that the only document the Charter Commission is required to produce by law is the Charter Document; however, the Charter Commission is not prohibited by law from writing a separate report, which addresses their findings with regards to the functionality of the present governmental organization, and any recommended improvements or organizational changes it may deem appropriate." It was further indicated that logic would seem to dictate that some sort of summary statement would be in order as a precursor to the Charter Document.
- 2)"Copies of an e-mail submitted by Frank Montenes to the Chairman via Tamela Ramos was distributed to the Charter Commission members by the Chair. Although the primary focus was on comments to the "Public

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Input Meetings document," prepared by the Chairman, there were several other issues that Mr. Montenes wanted to make sure that the Charter Commission members had an opportunity for open discussion on these issues at the appropriate time."

7. Communications.

- 1) The Whitman Center distributed notebooks for every charter member that includes the official agendas and minutes for the previous meetings.
- 2) A handout from the County Extension Service was distributed.
- 3) A handout titled "Boards/Committees, Escambia County, Florida," from the County Administrator's office was distributed.
- 4) Copy of an e-mail from Dr. Teasley to Mr. Menge that addresses the issue of the \$20 million for 'Economic Environment' was distributed to the members.
- 5) Signed copy of the letter to Mr. Touart regarding the invoice dated March 12, 2003, was provided to the members.

8. Status report on the Charter Commission's website.

Ms. Ramos gave an overview of what is in the website and stated that the site is up and running. The website is www.haas.uwf.edu/charter. Commission members are to look at it and give their feedback to Ms. Ramos in the next week.

9. Unfinished Business.

Mr. McKinnon asked the other members as to the exact definition of a minority according to the voter's rights law. Mr. Boyd stated that the law is directed towards African Americans.

10. Items added to the agenda.

There were no items added to the agenda.

11. Announcement of the next public input meeting.

The next meeting is May 6, 2003 in the Baroco Center, Room 2142, at the Pensacola Junior College Pensacola Campus at 4 p.m.

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12. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Action Items:

None

APPROVED BY:

THE CHARTER COMMISSION

PREPARED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA WHITMAN CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE