

Official

**Minutes Of The Escambia County Charter Commission Meeting  
Held June 3, 2003 - 7 p.m.  
Escambia County Courthouse – Third Floor  
(7:00 p.m-9:00 p.m.)  
(Eighteenth Meeting)**

Members

Present:	M. J. Menge, Chair	Elbert Jones, Jr.
	Johnny W. Blackmon	Frank Montenes
	Le Roy Boyd	E. P. “Ted” Nickinson, Jr.
	Barbara Forehand “Bobbie” Brown	,Phyllis D. Sims
	Laurel Dick	Lamar Smith

Members

Absent: Rita A. Riffel, Vice Chairman (conflict in schedule)  
Charles F. Beall, Jr (out of town)  
Denis McKinnon, Jr. (conflict in schedule)  
Lucy Rentz (conflict in schedule)  
Garrett W. Walton (out of town)

**AGENDA NUMBER**

1. Call to order - Chairman Menge at 7:00p.m.
2. Approval of the Agenda.

**Motioned by Mr. Blackmon and seconded by Mr. Jones, to approve the agenda, with #5 being stricken from the agenda since the minutes are not ready, motion carried 10-0, with Ms. Riffel, Mr. Beall, Mr. McKinnon, Ms. Rentz, and Mr. Walton absent and Ms. Brown 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

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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. Mr. Menge stressed that the Charter Commission would like to hear public opinion on the changes they would like to see, if any in Escambia County government.

4. Open public forum on provisions that the public desires to have included in the charter.

Eleven people addressed the Commission and their statements are as follows:

- 1) Sandy Johnston – Works for the Pensacola Beach Chamber of Commerce and is very much in support of the Santa Rosa Island Authority (SRIA). She met with some of the business owners on the beach that would be unable to speak tonight and wanted to relay what their views are of the SRIA. The owners feel as if the SRIA helps to expedite completion of needs of the owners, i.e. after Hurricane Opal, businesses were up and running after six months, the SRIA knew what needed to be done and knew where to go to get help, the County would have difficulty keeping up with the status quo and know what is happening on Pensacola Beach, SRIA takes care of things before it becomes a problem, i.e. the beach re-nourishment program instituted before the beach was lost. Lease fees are utilized by the SRIA for maintenance and the beach is kept nice for visitors and residents alike, the maintenance department takes care of things immediately, it is all the small things that add up and make the SRIA.
- 2) Vince Whibbs – Believes that the SRIA is capable, dedicated, and committed to do the things that make Pensacola Beach an asset, SRIA is responsive and receptive to listening to needs of the residents, board is dedicated, capable, communicative, and knowledgeable, SRIA is a producer of revenue and recreation and helps to bring the community together, it is productive as it exists today, from a cost standpoint you cannot get more bang for your buck, it is not broke so don't fix it.
- 3) Gale Fournier – Wanted to know if all members of the SRIA lived in Escambia County, she believes that this needs to be a necessity and all members of the SRIA board need to be elected, the SRIA is broke and it is time for the board to move on, many things that the board votes on benefits the SRIA, fees collected do not pay for fire protection on the island – she heard it is subsidized by Escambia County. She believes the Constitutional

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Officers need to remain Constitutional Officers. In the current wave of budget crunching, why is everyone else willing to cut their budgets except for the Constitutional Officers? Charter should give people the control of the Constitutional Officer's budget, public needs more access to accomplish things in the county, charter should make it easier for the people to complain and remove someone from office.

- 4) Mark Triplett – Discussed the BCC and thinks it needs to be increased to 7 or 9, 5 single districts with others at-large, non-partisan, no term limits, lower salaries to go with part-time positions, BCC should be a legislative, policy setting body, retain private office space with a secretary, vacancies to be filled by special election, non-interference clause, 4-yr terms, believes in charter government, elect the Constitutional Officers except for the sheriff, county manager form of government with the position to be filled by a simple majority vote of the BCC, charter should contain minimum qualifications of the county manager, time to abolish the civil service, have an individual appeals board under county manager, establish merit system, recall provisions that apply to all elected officials, establish a code of ethics, bill of rights (Broward & Miami-Dade have good examples) . The SRIA is a costly duplication of service, consolidate into county government, beach would not go away if there was no SRIA. Consolidate the ECUA also, the many authorities lead to conflict and does not allow for modernization. Citizens should have the right to appeal and revise the charter.
- 5) Byron Keesler – Wanted to clarify that his dissatisfaction has nothing to do with any board member or staff of the SRIA, it is the same dissatisfaction with any RTA and any other appointed board that routinely renders binding legislative type decisions without full accountability to the electorate, SRIA has only one elected member – only elected by beach residents, SRIA has become less of a public resource, decisions are made by people that are not accountable to the voter, decisions have been proven to be uncontestable, appointments are seemingly for life, these are abuses of the application and not flaws of the system and might be corrected. The democratic process was overlooked and bypassed 57 years ago when the SRIA was formed. SRIA operates with all the authority of a territorial government, cannot vote the board out and no service of SRIA that cannot be performed by the county. SRIA mission was to over develop the island, if charter should be written without a provision to remove the SRIA, it would signal an acceptance of business as usual.
- 6) Karl Boyles – Has served on the SRIA for the past 12 years, takes exceptions that SRIA members stand to gain, he has seen no evidence of that, SRIA allows enterprise zone to operate, benefits the leaseholders, overdevelopment is a myth, cap has almost been reached and the development is much less than

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Orange Beach, Perdido Key, Panama City, and Destin and it will not become more developed. Pensacola Beach is only about 7 miles and the rest of the 21 miles is undeveloped and will not be. SRIA operates a clean beach, attracts tourism, the tourists spend money and leave, people who have served on the board have been from a variety of backgrounds, they take care of problems rapidly, and roads have been fixed. SRIA is beneficial to Escambia County and should be maintained.

- 7) Michael Hamlin - Civil service is outdated, BCC should go to 7, with 2 being appointed by the BCC by way of vote and require minimum qualifications for the positions.
- 8) Jan Scruggs – Owner of the Dock, restaurant and bar on Pensacola Beach, SRIA gave her all the information she needed when she was interested in purchasing a business on the beach, SRIA is very accessible, maintenance board responds in ten minutes to a complaint of trash needing to be picked up. The board and the staff appear to work together well and she had no problems until she had to go to Escambia County for assistance.
- 9) Jim Taylor – Wants to leave Constitutional Officers alone, Constitutional Officers should be able to control their own budget, nervous about too much power being put in the hands of one person (County Manager). Constitutional Officers are accountable to the people.
- 10) Jeff Marker – The Charter Commission has been lead to believe that everything is wonderful on the beach. The current SRIA structure is flawed, it is a fiefdom, staff are doing a great job, but does not agree with the board – 5 appointed members that are not accountable to the electorate, no term limits, except for the elected member, it is a ruling board not a serving board, it needs to be abolished and the county take over. Does not like the idea of 10 BCC, and as for the salaries – you get what you pay for.
- 11) Monte Blews – SRIA General Manager did clarify that with 6 members on the board he has only experienced a tie vote once in the past ten years.

5. Communications

- 1) Memo from Frank Montenes “Suggestions for making the Public Input Meetings more Effective.”
- 2) Memo from Frank Montenes “Suggested by-laws for the Charter Commission, discussion of town hall meeting, and process to follow in writing the draft for the Charter Document.”

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6. Unfinished Business

Mr. Menge announced that Escambia County Human Resources Department extended an invitation to the Charter Commission to attend a meeting On June 10, 5:15 pm in their Town & Country office to hear George Touart review the changes outlined for their department.

Mr. Montenes reviewed his memo and expressed concern with the lack of public input and wanted to share ideas on how to stimulate the citizens to participate. He would like to see a one page document instead of the pamphlet that covers all the topics the Charter Commission wants addressed. Charter continues to have a great deal of contact with the Pensacola News Journal, The Florida Sun seems to be more interested in covering charter, and Dick Appleyard has been in contact with the radio stations. A possibility of forming sub-committees was discussed to deal with the publicity issue. Members suggested to possibly publish what the Charter Commission will not be doing. One idea is to take the synopsis that the Whitman Center is going to put together and write a viewpoint article for the News Journal and include the advice that the legal team has provided. It was agreed that the Commission needs to move to the real issues in order to move forward and engage in real dialogue that could move the charter forward.

The next two meetings will continue as is: June 19 at Molino Elementary, 7 pm and June 30 at Perdido Bay United Methodist Church, 7 pm. It was agreed upon that Tuesday July 22, BCC at 5:30 pm will cover personnel and civil service and Tuesday August 5 will be the town hall meeting at a location to be decided upon. Mr. Jones agreed to help locate a facility for the town hall meeting.

Mr. Menge gave his idea on how the drafting of the charter document will take place. First, take a look at what we have learned; determine what the problems are and which ones need to be addressed in the charter. Second, decide how the charter can fix the problems. Then start on the topics the public addressed the commission on and get everyone's thoughts on those and start voting as to what should go into the charter. Mr. Beall, Ms. Sims, and Mr. Walton are requested to assist in drafting the actual document. All charter members can assist by looking at some of the existing charters to get ideas of how they want Escambia County's charter to read.

7. Items Added to the Agenda

There were no items added to the agenda.

8. Announcement regarding the next public input meeting.

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Next meeting will be June 19 at Molino Elementary Auditorium, 7 P.M.  
and the topic will be whatever the public desires to speak about.

9. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

**Action Items:**

- 1) **Mr. Jones to work with the Whitman Center to locate a facility for the town hall meeting.**

**APPROVED BY:**

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**THE CHARTER COMMISSION**

**PREPARED BY:**

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**UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA WHITMAN CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**