

Unofficial

**Minutes Of The Escambia County Charter Commission Meeting
Held June 19, 2003 – 7 p.m.
Molino Elementary School Auditorium
(Nineteenth Meeting)**

Members

Present: M. J. Menge, Chair
Charles F. Beall, Jr
Johnny W. Blackmon
Le Roy Boyd
Barbara Forehand “Bobbie” Brown
Laurel Dick
Elbert Jones, Jr.
Denis McKinnon, Jr.
Lucy Rentz
Lamar Smith
Garrett W. Walton

Members

Absent: Rita A. Riffel, Vice Chairman (conflict in schedule)
Frank Montenes (illness in family)
E. P. “Ted” Nickinson, Jr. (illness)
Phyllis D. Sims (conflict in schedule)

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

Motion made by Mr. Dick and seconded by Mr. Jones to approve the agenda. Motion carried 8 – 0 with Mr. Beall, Mr. Blackmon, and Mr. Walton arriving late and Ms. Riffel, Mr. Montenes, Mr. Nickinson, and Ms. Sims absent.

3. Statement regarding the 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

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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. 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.

Two people addressed the Charter Commission and their statements are as follows:

- 1) Robert Raede – Gave the Charter Commission members a handout of his proposal to improve Escambia County Government. He would like to see ten County Commissioners, two elected from each of the five districts, staggered four year terms, partisan elections, part time legislative policy setting body, salary to be set by charter, an assistant for each district, and the BCC would elect a presiding officer at the first meeting of each calendar year. An elected county executive (six year term) form of government is preferred.
- 2) Clarence Gulsby – Has several questions to address the Commission on, wanted to know what was in the charter and how much it costs. What is the cost of charter government versus what is currently in place? He quoted from the 1999 Florida County Government financial trends and stated that it cost \$1,115.45 per person for Constitutional Government and \$1,790.53 per person for Charter Government. How much tax money has been spent on the charter to date? Wanted a list of private donors to the charter movement. He felt like it was the downtown crowd that was pushing the charter and wondered why after it was voted down twice, there is another charter movement. He is against charter government.

Mr. Menge responded to Mr. Gulsby's questions with the assistance of Dr. Teasley from the Whitman Center. Dr. Teasley discussed the study of the comparison costs of non-chartered governments versus chartered counties. There was a very slight difference in the cost of running the two different forms of government. He did explain that Escambia County is already levying a higher millage rate than most all the other counties, whether they are charter or non-charter. Dr. Teasley clarified the difference in how taxes are

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collected and in what category they are collected under.

Mr. Menge stated that the 1999 Florida County Government financial trends report cited by Mr. Gulsby included municipal finances in addition to county finances and was not an accurate reflection of just county finances. The research performed by The Whitman Center shows that the amount of taxes paid by taxpayers in chartered counties is almost the same as the amount of taxes paid by the taxpayers in non-chartered counties. Based on the assessed value of real property and the average per capita income, Escambia County is one the most heavily taxed counties in Florida. Mr. Menge reminded those in attendance that copies of the Whitman Center report are available to the public.

In further response to the questions posed by Mr. Gulsby, Mr. Menge stated the budget for the Charter Commission is \$49,000, including expenses, of which \$15,000 has been spent. With regard to a list of donors supporting the charter movement, Mr. Menge indicated such a list was available from the Supervisor of Elections office.

Mr. Menge acknowledged that proposed county charters had not been approved twice in the past. A proposed charter failed to gain approval by less than 2,000 votes in 1979 and a separate proposed charter failed by 56 votes in 1995. Supporters of a home rule charter continue to believe that local control of local government decisions is needed and that a restructuring of the local governmental bodies will result in more efficient and effective government.

5. Approval of the minutes of the May 22, May 27, and June 3, 2003 meetings.

Motion made to approve the minutes of the May 22, 2003 meeting by Mr. Dick and seconded by Ms. Rentz. Motion carried 10 – 0 with Mr. Beall arriving late and Ms. Riffel, Mr. Montenes, Mr. Nickinson, and Ms. Sims absent.

Motion made to approve the minutes of the May 27, 2003 meeting by Ms. Rentz and seconded by Mr. Jones. Motion carried 10 – 0 with Mr. Beall arriving late and Ms. Riffel, Mr. Montenes, Mr. Nickinson, and Ms. Sims absent.

Motion made to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2003 meeting by Mr. McKinnon and seconded by Mr. Smith. Motion carried 10 – 0 with Mr. Beall arriving late and Ms. Riffel, Mr. Montenes, Mr. Nickinson, and Ms. Sims absent.

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6. Communications

- 1) E-mail from Ms. Riffel titled “Ms. Riffel’s Comments.”
- 2) Brochure on SRIA visioning and their public input meetings.
- 3) Letter from Monte Blews regarding the meeting of June 3.
- 4) Handout from Robert Raede titled “Proposal to improve Escambia County Government.”

Mr. Menge announced that the Town Hall meeting will be at Greater Union Baptist Church on Tuesday August 5, at 7 pm.

7. Unfinished Business

Mr. Menge suggested that the Charter Commission meet on July 10th at 5:30 p.m. to review what the Commission had learned from the county officials and the public input meetings and to commence its deliberations on what needs to be addressed in the charter. The Commission agreed to meet on July 10th.

8. Items added to the agenda

There were no items added to the agenda.

9. Announcement regarding the next public input meeting.

Next meeting is Monday June 30, 2003 at 7 pm at Perdido Bay United Methodist Church located at 13660 Innerarity Point Road.

10. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Action Items:

- 1) **Whitman Center to contact County on use of BCC chambers for July 10 meeting.**
- 2) **Whitman Center to update website as needed. (ongoing)**

APPROVED BY:

THE CHARTER COMMISSION

PREPARED BY:

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