

CHARTER REVISION BOARD MINUTES
Citizen Outreach Meeting
Beach Community Center
3351 NE 33 Avenue
City of Fort Lauderdale
Monday, March 29, 2004 – 7:00 p.m.

	Attendance	Cumulative Attendance	
		Present	Absent
Chair Dan Lewis	P	5	0
James D. Camp	P	5	0
Chris Fertig	P	3	2
John M. Milledge	P	5	0
Ron Gunzburger	P	5	0

City Staff in Attendance

Mayor Jim Naugle
City Commissioner Christine Teel
Alan Silva, Acting City Manager
Harry Stewart, City Attorney
Terry Sharp, Director of Finance
Lisa Edmondson, Recording Clerk

CITIZEN OUTREACH MEETING

Chair Lewis called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. He provided an introduction to the Charter, explaining the process of Charter review and the purpose of the Board. He stated the Board would be reviewing the Charter and, along with City staff, making recommendations to the Commission.

Mr. Fred Taylor summarized his ideas as follows:

- Election of a financial officer
- Instituting a strong mayor form of government
- Increasing the number of City Commissioners to 7 members
- The Mayor be full time and fully compensated
- The City Manager not to be removed at the “whim” of the Commission

Mr. Joe Welch felt it was appropriate for the City Commission to have authority to replace the City Manager if it becomes necessary. He added the following points:

- Six months to live in the City prior to running for City Commission and Mayor is too short a period of time
- Sec, 3.15 - The number of signatures to sign a petition placing an initiative on the ballot should be increased
- Specific directions outlined in the Charter should be included to provide comparisons of actual versus budget information to the City Commission

- Sec. 9.02 – Regarding the City Manager’s budget message, there should be wording to prevent past problems, with a requirement for including language in the budget presentation showing how problems of prior years will be remedied
- In favor of the concept of an independent auditor reporting directly to the City Commission or the City Manager
- The current form of City government is ideal, with the addition of two-at large seats
- The size and number of districts are sufficient
- Commissioner salaries should be increased
- The vice mayor position should continue to be rotated among the Commission
- There should be an ombudsman-type staff or office created to handle inquiries and local problems outside of political channels

Ms. Pat Hale asked how many residents on average each commissioner represents in other municipalities. Mr. Gunzburger advised that it is often a matter of local preference. Ms. Hale felt that the number of commissioners could increase as the population grows. She was unsure whether City Commissioners should be full time positions.

Chair Lewis handed out his draft of a proposed Charter.

In response to Mr. Gunzburger’s question, a majority of the meeting participants agreed the Charter should provide for an independent auditor; several felt there should be more Commission districts.

Mr. Bob Grossman believed there should be six districts and a Mayor.

Mr. Ed Barranco questioned the procedure for forfeiture of office as stated in the Charter. Mr. Stewart explained that commissioners are subject to recall, but there must be a trier of fact to make that determination. There are no provisions for removal in the Charter; Florida Statutes provide for recall elections.

Mr. Ted Fling maintained that the City Commission is underpaid, he does not advocate expanding the number of Commissioners, and having Commissioners at-large is “folly.” He agreed with the concept of a financial auditor. Mr. Fling also mentioned the need for a dedicated staff for the Commissioners, and the current structure of the City Clerk’s office which leaves City Commissioners without the ability to have direct contact with or supervision over that department.

By a show of hands, approximately 12 of the participants were in favor of a strong mayor form of government.

Ms. Linda Shallenberger asserted there should four district seats, plus two at-large seats, and the Mayor, to give the Commission more of a “citywide perspective.” She also encouraged holding municipal elections in November with four-year commission terms.

Mr. Fred Taylor emphasized that the residents need more access to more Commissioners. He added consideration of providing retirement benefits for Commissioners who serve a certain number of terms.

Ms. Marilyn Markus opined that the Commissioners are “stretched” and having a problem focusing on issues in their own districts. She supported the addition of two at-large seats.

Mr. Carl Shallenberger agreed with adding two at-large commission seats to broaden availability of the residents to their Commissioners.

Mr. Tim Smith made the following recommendations:

- One additional district Commissioner, as well as one at-large seat elected to handle specific areas of focus, should be added
- The beach area deserves its own Commission representation
- The at-large Commissioner could also be Vice Mayor
- The concept of an independent auditor is a good one
- Commission salaries, with the exception of the Mayor, should not be increased
- Four year terms should be implemented, with two four-year term limits

Ms. Eugenia Ellis stated that population growth should be a springboard for additional districts. She also supported salary increases and the Charter addressing full time Commissioners with a commensurate salary, allowing no competing outside employment.

By a show of hands approximately half of the participants were in favor of adding seats on the Commission.

Mr. Bob Helmholdt stated he was a proponent of limited government and would not be in favor of enlarging the number of Commission seats. He made the following suggestions:

- The structure of private business should be applied to governments, although the current form of government is sufficient
- Commission seats should be made more “financially attractive” in keeping with the current market
- There should be an independent auditor

Mr. Don Larson offered the following points:

- Staggering terms and elections would be acceptable, but only with a seven member Commission
- The number of Commission seats should remain as is
- If the Commission is increased to seven members, adding one at-large and one district seat, a strong mayor form of government should be implemented
- There should be an independent auditor

Mr. Gunzburger pointed out that the Charter Revision Board had originally been empanelled to deal with open space and land issues, asking for comments in that regard also.

Mr. Fred Taylor spoke in favor of defining City parks in the Charter.

Mr. Birch Willey opined that the number of Commission seats should remain as is, although did agree that the number may have to increase if the population grows substantially.

Mr. Barranco suggested that the entire section of the Charter pertaining to disposal of land should be deleted and replaced with, "The City Commission has the authority to dispose of property as it sees fit." He was also a proponent of the City Commission having the authority to hire and fire its own staff and felt that open space should be mandated by ordinance, not the Charter.

Mr. Ralph Hamalar was opposed to removing open space requirements from of the Charter.

Mr. Dave Lerbs proposed dissolving and incorporating the City into Broward County.

The Board discussed having one more community outreach meeting to be held at City Hall in April - date and time to be determined.

***Motion** made by Mr. Gunzburger, seconded by Mr. Milledge, to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2004; February 23, 2004; March 1, 2004; and March 15, 2004. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.*

Thereupon the meeting concluded at 8:40 p.m.