

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

**GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND PRESERVING INSTITUTIONAL**

**KNOWLEDGE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**Don Davis Room, 1st floor, City Hall**

**November 8, 2019**

**9:00 a.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ronald Swanson (Chair), Jessica Baker, Heidi Jameson (arr. 9:11) Nelson McCoy, Matt Schellenberg

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements and Anthony Baltiero – Council Research Division; Crystal Shemwell and Ladayija Nichols – Legislative Services Division; Melanie Wilkes – Council Staff Services

**Meeting Convened**: 9:03 a.m.

Chairman Swanson convened the meeting and the attendees introduced themselves for the record. Mr. Swanson reviewed the committee agenda for the day, which is to set the committee’s work process for the next few months. He has scheduled Lori Boyer and Chris Hand for the subcommittee’s next meeting to talk about recommendations made by prior commissions, how they were handled (or not handled), and whether they are still germane for study and potential recommendations by the current commission. General Counsel issues were not assigned to this subcommittee but may be somewhat relevant.

Commissioner McCoy advocated for dealing with General Counsel issues because they are so relevant to government structure and operations and also recommended looking at independent authority boards and how members could be removed and replaced. Commissioner Schellenberg agreed that issues of General Counsel and mayoral power are important and need to be reviewed because they are fundamental to how the city operates. He said that many people are concerned that the General Counsel has become too political and too closely tied to the Mayor. Mr. Schellenberg also advocated for studying the JEA, School Board, independent authorities. He felt that each committee needs to come up with only one or at most two recommendations and then push hard for their implementation; too many recommendations will dilute each other and very little will result, as was the case with the last Charter Revision Commission. Chairman Swanson noted that the General Counsel issue did not make the full commission’s top four priorities, so perhaps is not a proper topic for the subcommittee to pursue. Mr. Schellenberg responded that the powers of the General Counsel and Mayor are so controlling of everything that happens in the City that other topics and recommendations will be fruitless without progress on that front. He suggested that perhaps the mayor should be assigned an attorney by the General Counsel as the City Council and other departments and agencies are, so that the General Counsel would not be the mayor’s personal attorney. He urged that Mike Weinstein be invited back to address the subcommittee on several topics he addressed with the full commission regarding mayoral and General Counsel powers.

Commissioner Baker felt that the subcommittee should respect the full commission’s vote and charge and deal with the issues specifically assigned and not with the OGC, unless the full commission reconsiders that and makes a new assignment. She believes there are structural changes that can be made to improve government operations absent a discussion of the General Counsel. She recommended former Council President Bill Gulliford as another good source of perspective and ideas. Commissioner McCoy advocated for dealing with the General Counsel only to the extent needed to address the ability of the General Counsel to act as an independent arbiter to solve intra-governmental conflicts without personally representing one entity or the other. Commissioner Jameson felt that the subcommittee already has a very large job in dealing with Topics A and H as assigned by the Commission and doesn’t think that working on General Counsel issues would be warranted or productive since the full commission did not rank the General Counsel as a top four issue. She expressed concern about expanding the charge into another substantially large issue area and felt that if all the subcommittees did so then the vote of the commission to prioritize the issues and create the subcommittees would be nullified. Commissioner Schellenberg said that Chairman Brock authorized the subcommittees to look at topics related to their charge, and felt that that authorization would open the door to a General Counsel discussion if it’s relevant to the subcommittee’s work. Chairman Swanson felt that the full commission made specific assignments to the subcommittees and specifically did not prioritize or assign other issues, so he believes the General Counsel topic, as interesting and relevant as it may be, should be off the table.

Chairman Swanson asked for suggestions of specific questions or topics to propose to Ms. Boyer and Mr. Hand to address next week. Commissioner Jameson advocated for providing them with Topics A and H and their bullet points for them to know what the committee has been assigned to study. Ms. Boyer should be invited to address the Task Force on Consolidated Government’s work and findings. Mr. Swanson said that a discussion of previous recommendations from Charter Revision Commissions and the Task Force on Consolidated Government and why they were or were not implemented would be instructive. Commissioner Schellenberg recommended not confining the speakers to the specific bullet topics listed, but to allow them to opine on whatever issues they think are important for the work of the Commission. He thinks a brief opening statement by the guests and then lots of questions-and-answers would be the most productive use of the committee’s time.

Commissioner Baker suggested the need for discussion and clarity on what exactly Topic H incorporates so the committee understands where it’s going. Commissioner McCoy felt that there was substantial overlap between Topics A and H that would make the committee’s work somewhat easier than it might first appear. He thinks the committee would benefit most from lots of time for questions and answers with the speakers rather than them making presentations. In response to a question from Chairman Swanson about whether to try and develop some priorities to help guide the presenters next week, Mr. Schellenberg suggested urging them to focus on what is possible to achieve, rather than what might be perfect but unattainable. Mr. McCoy preferred developing the best possible recommendation, and then scaling back if necessary to what is achievable in the present on the way to the ultimate goal later. Commissioner Jameson said that reality is important, but she hopes the commission won’t restrict itself to counting votes and predicting public reaction and thereby limiting its scope of thought.

Commissioner Baker suggested scanning the list and eliminating any topic areas that clearly don’t have any support in the committee, specifically the bullet point on making the Council President an elected, 4-year position. Commissioner Jameson asked how the committee would deal with speakers who delve into topics that aren’t in the committee’s portfolio or have been assigned to other committees.

The committee was in recess from 10:04 to 10:09 a.m.

Chairman Swanson asked for suggestions of speakers for future meetings. The committee discussed future meeting date availability. The full commission meets November 22nd. The group agreed on December 12-13 and 16-18 as meeting date windows, with specifics to be determined. After the presentations next week the committee will begin honing in on specific priorities to study. Commissioner Baker noted that “fulfilling promises of consolidation” is a topic under the Urban Services Subcommittee and recommended that it be removed from this committee’s topic list. The group decided to hold off on that decision until after next week’s presentations.

Public Comment

John Nooney recited the Pledge of Allegiance and recommended a Charter amendment requiring that projects supported by the DIA and the Community Redevelopment Areas must provide for public access to waterways. He cited the Florida Ocean Alliance Strategic Plan for Florida’s Coasts and its importance to Jacksonville’s waterways. The Charter Revision Commission has unbelievable power and shouldn’t be afraid to use it.

Future meetings

December 12th from 9 to 11 a.m.; December 16th from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

Staff was requested to invite Mike Weinstein to the December 12 meeting and to contact Bill Gulliford and Sam Mousa about appearing on either date.

**Meeting adjourned:** 10:28 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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Posted 11.8.19 11:30 a.m.