

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

**URBAN SERVICES DISTRCT SUBCOMMITTEE TOWN HALL MEETING MINUTES**

**Highlands Middle School, 10913 Pine Estates Road East, Jacksonville**

**February 18, 2020**

**6:00 p.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ann-Marie Knight (Chair), Charles Griggs, Frank Denton, Celestine Mills

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division; Jessica Matthews, Jessica Smith, Sharonda Davis, Vonya Balogh, Ladayija Nichols – Legislative Services Division; Steve Cassada – Council Support Services

**Meeting Convened**: 6:10 p.m.

Chairwoman Knight convened the meeting and described to the attendees the organization and purposes of the Charter Revision Commission and the Urban Services District Committee. The commissioners introduced themselves for the record.

Public Comment

Karen Hamilton asked how citizens can impress upon the City Council the need for changes in the urban core and how the Charter Revision Commission’s recommendations will be transmitted to the council in hopes of generating some action. Chairwoman Knight described the wide range of speakers the CRC has heard from and said that the CRC will produce a very public document full of recommendations for the Council’s consideration. She urged that citizens advocate for the recommendations with the City Council. Commissioner Denton urged the public to read the report (available online at the City Council website) and then urge the Council to adopt those recommendations with which they agree. He noted that the last time a Charter Revision Commission met 10 years ago, almost none of its recommendations were considered by the City Council. He urged the citizens not to let that happen again by being proactive in advocating for change. Ms. Hamilton suggested taking the City Council members on a bus tour of the Northwest Quadrant to see the conditions for themselves and recognize the need for improvements. Commissioner Griggs said he thinks the committee’s recommendation for an Urban Services Development Authority will likely be the only CRC recommendation that will require a budget allocation, so citizens can help by advocating for that allocation in the budget process. He said that the City has proven to be good at funding what it considers to be important but not funding what it doesn’t find important. The public can be instrumental in helping to get the budget allocation approved.

Eunice Barnum said the Northwest area has real problems that need real solutions, not just talk. She asked how it could be that nothing ever changes in her community when the City government collects taxes and employs thousands of people to supposedly work for the good of the citizens. Nothing has changed in her community in decades. Commissioner Mills said one of the reasons is that the Northwest has not gotten the same level of commitment or investment as other parts of the city. Elected leadership and the school system have failed the neediest communities in Jacksonville. There will be no improvement until there’s an honest recognition of where the city has come from and why things are as bad as they are. There have been sporadic efforts to do positive things over the years, but they have been insufficient. Ms. Barnum asked how to enforce accountability in the city government. She thinks the Governor needs to step in and hold the city accountable for doing its job properly. The at-large council members are no help to her community. Commissioner Griggs explained how the CRC came to appoint a committee to look at the needs of the urban core and come up with some recommendations to make improvements for which the community has been advocating. He hopes the CRC’s recommendations will be a starting point leading to much better equity across the community.

Joann Brooks asked where funding could come from to rectify the problems of the Northwest area. Commissioner Griggs said the problems are huge and it will take a long time to make changes, and the will of the community at large will drive how quickly that happens. He repeated that the City funds what it considers to be a priority when it wants something done. The committee is modeling its recommendation on the Downtown Investment Authority which gets an annual appropriation for its administrative costs. Commissioner Denton said that the committee’s report reflects the fact that mere infrastructure improvements are not going to be the answer to all the community’s problems, which extend to matters of political leadership, community will and a long history of disparity.

Chairwoman Knight said the CRC has heard a lot about the lack of an overarching vision and strategic plan for the city. Some efforts have been made to make improvements, but coordination seems to be lacking.

Eunice Barnum said she is tired of laws not being followed and public officials not doing their jobs, the Charter Revision Commission included. Former council member Mia Jones was the only elected representative from this area that ever made a difference.

Chairwoman Knight thanked the attendees for their presence and their input tonight and said that the CRC can’t be successful without citizen support.

Committee discussion

Commissioner Mills said the commission can’t back what it doesn’t believe in, so urged her fellow commissioners to be very sure about what they’re proposing. She does not think the committee’s draft as currently presented represents her opinions and the written suggestions she provided earlier in the process, so she will be proposing changes before she can support the committee’s recommendation. Commissioner Denton said he would go through the draft again to see if he had left out any important viewpoints. He intends to include language conveying the passionate feelings of the committee members and the members of the public who have addressed the committee for the group’s consideration at Friday’s meeting. Jessica Matthews of the Legislative Services Division suggested that the committee might want to schedule another meeting on Thursday, February 27th to finalize the document before the full commission meeting on the 28th. Commissioner Mills said she was not available to meet on the 27th but would provide the written remarks representing what she feels was omitted from the current draft. Commissioner Griggs urged all the committee members to insert anything they felt was missing or needed amplification and the committee would go through the additions/deletions at Friday’s meeting and finalize the document.

Chairwoman Knight asked the committee if they agreed with the proposed charter amendment recommendation as currently worded; there was consensus agreement that the recommendation is appropriately worded. Chairwoman Knight asked if there was agreement on the proposed Urban Core Development Authority map, which represents Health Zone 1 excluding the jurisdiction of the Downtown Investment Authority. Commissioner Denton suggested consideration of excluding the area of Riverside/Five Points west of Interstate 95 as being a wealthy community that does not need the services of the UCDA. Commissioner Griggs suggested adding the area north to I-295 along Kings Road beyond Health Zone 1. Commissioner Denton suggested changing the wording of the recommendation to be “essentially Health Zone 1” and leaving City Council the authority to craft boundaries different from that zone. Commissioner Griggs said that zip codes are a very common unit of data collection, so that needs to be taken into account. Chairwoman Mills said that she understands that data collection is moving to a zip code and Census tract basis and not Health Zones. Mr. Griggs noted that Health Zone data is currently available and would be ready for use as soon as a UCDA was authorized. He thinks that Census tract data will move around over time. He suggested proposing a map with boundaries and “grey areas” just inside and just outside the boundary that can be adjusted and fine-tuned as need be.

There was committee consensus to remove the Riverside area west of I-95 from the UCDA boundary.

Chairwoman Knight recommended inverting priorities #1 and #2 to make the “promises of consolidation” priority first since it is fundamental. She recommended making the household income comparison into a chart to make the data more apparent. She recommended deleting the word “launched” with regard to initiatives. Chairwoman Knight questioned whether the Community Benefit Area reference belonged in the funding section; Mr. Griggs said he understood that the City would have to authorize CBAs, which is why they need to be mentioned in the recommendation.

Joann Brooks asked a question about the proposed map in the area of Park Street in Brooklyn and whether that area should be included or not; there is a pocket of low-income housing behind the Riverside Avenue developments along Park Street and McCoy’ s Creek. The committee felt that the UCDA would not invest its funds in the well developed areas along Riverside Avenue and the riverfront if that area was to be included in the UCDA boundary.

Eunice Barnum asked for clarification about how far north the boundary extended, and whether it included Kings Road and Soutel Drive. The committee agreed that it should extend north to I-295 and include those areas. Ms. Barnum questioned the relevance of the committee’s reference to tree canopy.

Commissioner Mills thanked the audience for their attendance and participation.

**Meeting adjourned:** 8:03 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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