

**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**

**February 27, 2020**

**9:15 a.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ronald Swanson (Chair), Jessica Baker, Heidi Jameson, Nelson McCoy (arr. 9:32)

**Excused:** Commissioner Matt Schellenberg

**Also**: Peggy Sidman – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements and Anthony Baltiero – Council Research Division; Jessica Smith – Legislative Services Division; Melanie Wilkes – Council Support Services

**Meeting Convened**: 9:23 a.m.

Chairman Swanson convened the meeting

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the committee meeting of February 14 were amended on the last page to change “majority African-American city” to “majority minority city” and were **approved unanimously as amended.** The minutes of the committee meeting of February 21, 2020 were **approved unanimously as distributed**.

Committee Discussion

Commissioner Baker reviewed the actions of the committee at its last meeting which included discussion of several potential recommendation topics (term limits, at-large council members, size of City Council, staggered terms, non-partisan elections); no votes were taken because the Chair was absent from the meeting. The group tentatively decided at the last meeting against making a recommendation to change the size of the council and against making a recommendation to make any changes to the at-large council members. A decision had been made at a previous meeting against making any recommendation on ranked-choice voting. Chairman Swanson asked the committee members to explain the issues they had researched to the full commission at tomorrow’s meeting and asked staff to have the 5 recommendations printed out for distribution.

Size and composition of City Council

Public participation: John Nooney advocated for keeping the 2-term limit on City Council. He feels some council members are not responsive to their constituents, so the at-large members play a valuable role.

**Motion**: make no recommendation to change the size or composition of the City Council – **approved unanimously**

Term limits

Public participation: John Nooney advocated for keeping the 2-term limit on City Council because the general public is sometimes ignored by their elected representatives. The “preserving institutional knowledge” argument sometimes results in council members knowing how to use the system to their personal advantage. Two term limits will help to rein in abuse of power.

**Motion**: extend the City Council term limit from 2 to 3 four-year terms, beginning with council members taking office in 2031

Commissioner Baker asked that the committee’s recommendation include the two articles she had distributed at the last meeting regarding public opinion at the local and national level in favor of two-term limits. She felt that the fact that council members can currently return to the council after sitting out an election argues against extending term limits. Chairman Swanson said that he would give Ms. Baker an opportunity to express her opinion in opposition to the committee’s recommendation at the full commission meeting tomorrow.

The motion was **approved 3-1** (Baker opposed)

Chairman Swanson felt that it wasn’t a bad thing for the committee to recommend the status quo in most instances if everyone felt the system was generally working well. He also felt that the General Counsel issue, while important, could best be dealt with by the City Council if they also feel it is important.

At the request of Commissioner Jameson, Deputy General Counsel Peggy Sidman explained how the City Council’s strategic planning process for its 1-, 3- and 5-year priorities was accomplished over the last 2 years and how those priorities have been funded with $5 million allocations in the annual budget. She explained the relationship between the City Council’s strategic plan, the City’s annual budget, and the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan.

Jeff Clements described the work of the Commission’s Citywide Strategic Plan Committee and the difficulty they are having in arriving at a good membership for their proposed Strategic Planning Commission, given the restrictions imposed by the Government in the Sunshine Law on those members who might have regular interactions in the course of their jobs which would therefore be covered by the open meetings requirement. Ms. Sidman said this problem has been addressed on other boards and commissions by having some important interests represented by subject matter experts acting as advisors to the board rather than voting members. She described the process of policies being adopted by legislative bodies which are then carried out by executive/administrative personnel.

Ms. Sidman described the history of legislation she has been requested to draft to change City election dates to a variety of alternatives and the fact that all have failed to date. Chairman Swanson noted that the committee’s recommendation on that score has already been made to the full commission.

Commissioner Baker thanked the chairman for running a great committee. Chairman Swanson thanked the staff for their hard work in support of the committee’s work.

Public Comment

John Nooney said that ethics was put back into the Charter 10 years ago but has been gutted in the meantime. He advocated for increased public access to the City’s waterways. He referenced Ordinance 2007-451-E that provided for seizure and impoundment of illegally docked vessels. He advocated for a Charter amendment requiring that all projects supported with public funds by the DIA, CRAs or the proposed Urban Core Development Authority that have a waterways component must permit public access to the waterways. Jacksonville’s waterways are empty because access has been given to special interest groups. He lamented the lack of testimony to the Charter Revision Commission by experts in waterways issues.

**Meeting adjourned:** 10:17 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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