



Charter Review

Legislative Subcommittee Minutes

Tacoma Municipal Building North, 733 Market Street, Room 12

www.cityoftacoma.org/charterreview

March 19, 2014 – 6:00 p.m.

Chair Leighton called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Committee Members Present: 4 – Brackett, Leighton, Talton, and Van Dyk.

Committee Members Excused Absence: 3 – Farrell (arrived at 6:24 p.m.), Hahn, Merritt (arrived at 6:36 p.m.)

Approval of the minutes of the meetings of March 5 and 12, 2014

Chair Leighton stated the approval of the minutes will occur next week so Committee members have time to review them.

Work Session – Article II – The Legislative Branch – City Charter

Chair Leighton stated he heard last night at the Administrative Subcommittee meeting that the Legislative Subcommittee is supposed to be looking at Article II through the lens of leaving the form of government as is, and through the lens of changing the form of government. He noted this was not communicated previously but requested members of the Subcommittee consider this as they continue their work. He then suggested going through some of the topic assignments in Article II and having those present provide status updates on the work and discussion so far.

For Section 2.3, relative to a full-time Council and compensation, Chair Leighton noted state law prohibits first class cities from putting pay in the Charter, and it states very clearly that pay has to be set by Ordinance. He stated Committee Member Farrell talked about formalizing the workload of the City Council through the number of meetings and codifying the Committee structure. Chair Leighton suggested a compensation scale, noting he would have to check if it still fit within the confines of state law, and discussed setting up a citizens' commission on compensation, which could be modeled after the commission who sets compensation for executive members of state government. He noted the City of Puyallup also has a citizens' commission. Discussion ensued regarding what full-time means as a City Council member, and one suggestion was to restrict Council Members from having other employment.

Committee Member Farrell arrived here, at 6:24 p.m.

Chair Leighton stated another option is to model compensation after Pierce County, so each Council Member would be paid no less than 75% of the Mayor's salary, whose compensation is set by ordinance, noting right now that would be approximately \$69,000. He noted it would need legal review whether that fits in the confines of state law, and if the Charter could designate a percentage for compensation and not a dollar amount. Committee Member Brackett stated you could make an argument that if Council Members are going to be full-time, there could be fewer of them and that could also answer the question of staff support. Committee Member Farrell noted part of the problem is there is nothing that says the City Council will be full-time or part-time and the average voter likely does not realize how much work goes into being a Council Member. He then spoke on codifying the committee structure into the Charter, to outline the responsibility of a Council Member and to preserve the committee structure should City management change.

Discussion ensued regarding the number of meetings the City Council must hold each year, what constitutes a "regular" meeting, and what additional research is needed on this issue. Chair Leighton requested all Committee Members be prepared next week for a formal Committee recommendation on this issue to move on to the full Charter Review Committee. He noted, as no dissent was heard at tonight's meeting, he and Committee Member Farrell would continue to review and discuss codifying the Committee structure, and a full-time City Council.

For Section 2.35, relative to term limits, Committee Member Van Dyk stated he is still trying to figure out the best way to determine this, noting he has not found much comparative research and everything out there is opinion and philosophy. Chair Leighton stated he felt it was appropriate for the group as engaged citizens to have a discussion on term limits without a large amount of comparative research, noting the Committee has heard testimony to keep term limits and to extend term limits. He then stated he would like to explore breaking the Council and Mayor term limits counting against each other. Discussion ensued regarding options for term limits.

Jim Merritt arrived at 6:36 p.m. during the discussion on term limits.

Chair Leighton reviewed the options discussed tonight, include the status quo, setting terms according to a district position versus an at-large position, extending term limits to 12 years, or leaving term limits as is but separating term limits as the Mayor versus a Council Member.

Committee Member Merritt stated his charge was to look at the number of Council Members and districts. Chair Leighton requested to finish the term limits discussion before moving into Section 2.1.

Chair Leighton called for a vote on the following:

All those in favor of keeping limits on how long our elected officials can be in office.

Voice vote was taken and carried with Committee Member Brackett voting in opposition.

Chair Leighton stated the vote is just to determine the general direction and feeling of the subcommittee so that Committee Member Van Dyk has guidance on what to work on further. He asked Committee Member Van Dyk to type up the options discussed for further discussion of pros and cons at the next meeting.

For Sections 2.8-2.10, relative to procedures for Council confirmation of directors, Committee Member Farrell stated this item wound up being in Article III, Sections 3.2 and 3.3 and he and Committee Member Brackett will talk with the Administrative Subcommittee.

For Section 2.1, relative to the number of Council Members and districts, Committee Member Merritt noted he explored the number of Council Members and it all comes down to local preference. He reviewed the City of Spokane's structure, which tied in the Neighborhood Councils, noting they have basically six City Council Members and a Council president that is elected at-large. Spokane has three districts in the City, and there are two Council Members elected from each district. He stated the president is elected at-large and is also the Mayor Pro-Tem. Committee Member Merritt requested the Committee explore the number of City Council Members and look at whether Tacoma should move to five or seven members, noting it would be less expensive and they could have Council staff. Discussion ensued regarding Council districts and the Neighborhood Councils, and whether they should be aligned or left as is. Committee Member Talton stated the districts were set up for different reasons and the Neighborhood Councils are about citizen participation and act as an extension of municipal government to some degree.

Chair Leighton requested Committee Member Merritt work with the Human Resources Subcommittee to see what they are doing with regard to Neighborhood Councils. He stated he would like to see proposals for the number of districts at the next meeting and what the number of Council Members could look like if the form of government is changed, noting it should probably be reduced to seven members. He then requested everyone think about what the Committee envisions Article II to be if there is a form of government change.

Public Comment

None.

Committee Comments

None.

Adjournment

On proper motion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.



Justin Leighton, Chair



Doris Sorum, City Clerk