



City of North Port

4970 City Hall Blvd
North Port, FL 34286

Meeting Minutes - Final City Commission Joint Meeting

CITY COMMISSIONERS

Debbie McDowell, Mayor

Jill Luke, Vice Mayor

Christopher Hanks, Commissioner

Pete Emrich, Commissioner

Vanessa Carusone, Commissioner

APPOINTED OFFICIALS

Peter Lear, City Manager

Amber L. Slayton, City Attorney

Heather Taylor, Interim City Clerk

Wednesday, February 19, 2020

6:00 PM

City Commission Chambers

Joint Meeting with Charter Review Advisory Board

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor McDowell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: 5 - Commissioner Christopher Hanks, Mayor Debbie McDowell, Vice Mayor Jill Luke, Commissioner Vanessa Carusone and Commissioner Pete Emrich

Also Present

City Manager Pete Lear, City Attorney Amber Slayton, Interim City Clerk Heather Taylor, Recording Secretary Susan Hale, and Police Chief Todd Garrison.

Charter Review Advisory Board Chair Cory Hutchinson, Vice Chair Justin Willis, Board Members Melanie Breuer, Eve Sweeting, David Duval, and Andrew Sias.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chair Hutchinson.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Hanks, seconded by Vice Mayor Luke, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Hanks, Mayor McDowell, Vice Mayor Luke, Commissioner Carusone and Commissioner Emrich

2. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jeffrey Scott: government accountability and Commission absenteeism.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS:**A. [20-1907](#)** Discussion on Composition of Commission with an Elected Mayor, Similar to the City of Venice

Chair Hutchinson introduced the item.

Discussion took place regarding Commission decisions from the December Workshop, maintaining the Commission mayor/vice mayor decisions previously determined, removing the phrase "provided that the terms are not consecutive" for the mayor.

Commissioner Hanks opined that the mayor is a leadership position, leadership ability will garner votes necessary for both positions, a certain skillset needed to govern a meeting, Commission electing a leader, and not changing the mayor/vice mayor rotation.

Discussion continued regarding the opportunity of citizens to vote on the mayor position as an elected seat, keeping the prohibition of not being able to serve two consecutive terms without it rotating, voting within the Commission can be negative, and providing Florida League of Cities statistics pertaining to strong mayor/weak mayor forms of government.

A motion was made by Commissioner Carusone, seconded by Vice Mayor Luke, to propose a Charter question to amend Section 5.03 to allow for a mayor position to be on rotation and removing the word "consecutive" to allow the position that an incoming mayor may choose not to serve and the sitting mayor may retain the seat; the incoming mayor cannot appoint someone who is not currently serving as mayor unless there is a super majority; if incoming mayor refuses the role, as does the remainder of the Commission, the incoming mayor should be compelled to serve.

Mayor McDowell did not support the motion due to it being convoluted and having a rotating basis, stating which district it starts is imperative, agreed with the current mayor rotation, and the Commission will experience the ensuing consequences.

A motion was made by Commissioner Carusone, seconded by Vice Mayor Luke, to amend the motion so that the position of mayor's rotation starts with the Commission District 5, and working down to District 1.

Discussion ensued including an observation of elaborate wording to change one word, and circumstances preventing someone from serving as mayor.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

Yes: 3 - Vice Mayor Luke, Commissioner Carusone and Commissioner Emrich

No: 2 - Commissioner Hanks and Mayor McDowell

Mayor McDowell and Commissioner Hanks dissented for reasons stated.

Discussion ensued regarding voters already voting for capable leaders, difference running for mayor vs. running for commissioner, and full-time/part-time commissioners.

The main motion as amended carried by the following vote:

Yes: 3 - Vice Mayor Luke, Commissioner Carusone and Commissioner Emrich

No: 2 - Commissioner Hanks and Mayor McDowell

Discussion continued pertaining to dividing Charter Review's recommendations for discussion purposes.

B. [20-1906](#)**Discussion on Options for City Commission Districting/Redistricting**

Chair Hutchinson introduced the item.

Mayor McDowell read the Commission decisions from the December Workshop were read.

Ms. Slayton provided a general review of her memo in answer to the 5% Census question.

Discussion ensued regarding expanding to seven Commissioners and the City's population not significantly dense to expand, providing Florida League of Cities statistics pertaining to five member councils vs. seven member councils, general support for three-two districts with two at-large, the current districting still being new, having one at-large seat on every election, giving the current plan a chance to work, the Commission directive being effective after the 2020 election and taking effect in 2022 or 2024, leaving the decision to a future Commission and working this system first, compromising Board recommendations and Commission decisions, Charter Review Board's discussion points presented to the Commission were agreed by consensus, Commission representing citizens best interest, collaboration between the Board and Commission, and Commission's role to direct staff.

Ms. Taylor spoke to the due date for submitting referendum items for primary elections.

There was a consensus by the Charter Review Advisory Board to agree to the Commission consensus to work on a Commission composition of three district seats with two at-large seats using the 2020 Census to draw districts and after approved, to become effective at the next general election in 2022.

Ms. Taylor corrected the cutoff date for the general election and the cutoff date for the primary election.

A motion was made by Commissioner Carusone, seconded by Vice Chair Luke, to change the construction portion of the districting and redistricting plans of the Charter, to allow for a three district seat, two seats at-large using the 2020 Census becoming effective for the general election in 2022, having staff determine how to best implement that allows for no seated commissioner to be districted out of their representative area, and allowing for one at-large seat at each cycle.

After Ms. Slayton requested clarification regarding at-large at each cycle, it was stated the intent was every two years there is an at-large seat elected.

Discussion ensued regarding tasking staff with modifying the verbiage to stagger two at-large seats.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Hanks, Mayor McDowell, Vice Mayor Luke, Commissioner Carusone and Commissioner Emrich

C. [20-1909](#)**Discussion on District Residency Requirements for City Commissioners and Creating an Exception for Redistricting as it Relates to the Census**

Chair Hutchinson introduced the item.

Discussion ensued and it was noted that the last motion will solve this potential situation, and additional details will be discussed when staff brings their recommendation.

Ms. Slayton spoke to the proposed referendum questions being individual with a possibility not all will be passed by voters.

No action was required.

Recess was taken from 7:35 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

D. [20-1905](#)

Discussion on City Commissioner Compensation Determination and Job Description

Chair Hutchinson introduced the item and requested to separate the two items for discussion.

Discussion ensued including a Board Member opining the total budget cost of the Commission is excessive.

Mr. Lear spoke to the City's grand total cost per each Commission seat, and the Florida Retirement System contributions being State mandated.

Discussion continued regarding the City needing to draw quality leaders, compensation in the Charter is unwise, and the Commission position being full-time, and Chair Hutchinson requested a consensus among the Charter Review Advisory Board regarding the Commission salary and how it is generated being in the City Charter. No consensus was obtained.

Discussion continued regarding Commissioners elected for different reasons, Commission pay historically, a recalculation of Commission salary needing to follow State Statutes for Constitutional officers, Commission job descriptions working against the underlying intent of the agenda item, voter responsibility to research candidates, local government vs. state government, the complexity and expense of Charter changes vs. City Code changes, the commitment to the civic service, and no Florida League of Cities statistics found pertaining to job descriptions for an elected official.

There was a unity of sentiment among the Commission not to change the compensation method or require a job description.

No action was required.

E. [20-1908](#)

Discussion on Spending Limits for Non-Essential Projects

Chair Hutchinson introduced the item and explained the idea of limiting the funding expended on an amenity or non-essential item before it must go to referendum.

Discussion ensued regarding defining essential and non-essential items, the public being vocal concerning the topic, the intent of the item was to promote discussion on record, adequate of cause and effect information when it relates to spending limits and what departments it will affect, and a 40-page document regarding spending limits in city governments.

There was a consensus to direct the City Clerk to forward to the Commission the 40-page document regarding spending limits in city governments that was previously distributed at a Charter Review Advisory Board meeting.

Discussion ensued regarding essential and non-essential items when levels of service change, decision-making based on one action, the subjectivity of essential and non-essential items, limiting spending cannot be justified, impact and timing of elections required for referendums, a future discussion needed to define amenity (non-essential items), public input required, issues that divide the City, insufficient information to make a decision on this item, the overall impact unknown, and City's obligation to create amenities, impact fee project, and level of service expectations of citizens as taxpayers.

Due to insufficient information, it was determined not to set limits for non-essential projects.

No action was required.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment.

5. ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor McDowell adjourned the meeting at 9:24 p.m.

City of North Port, Florida

By: _____
Debbie McDowell, Mayor

Attest: _____
Heather Taylor, Interim City Clerk

Minutes approved at the Commission Regular Meeting this ____ day of _____, 2020.