

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

A meeting of the Charter Review Commission was held on Wednesday, January 7, 2009 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 P.M. by former Council President Aram Garabedian.

Present: Ronald D'Agostino, Frank Mattiucci, Jeanne Mizzoni, Randall Jackvony, Alfred Notarianni, Michael Mulcahy, Holly Scripsack, Simeone Parente and Steven Carrera.

Absent: John DGenova and Nathan Canaan.

Also Present: former Council President Aram Garabedian, former Councilman Jeffrey Barone, Council President Lanni and Councilman Santamaria.

Former Council President Garabedian was present to give an outline of the Charter and what this Commission's duties are and stated what the mission of the Charter Review Commission is and our Home Rule Charter is very important to the City. He presented copies of Article 13 of the Constitution and stated that in 1951, people of Rhode Island passed legislation allowing cities and towns who wanted a Home Rule Charter and people at that time passed this.

Mr. Garabedian stated that the Charter Review Commission would submit recommendations to the Council and the Council then can accept or reject those recommendations. In some cases, if the Charter Review Commission was not needed, the Council would make the amendments and place them on the ballot.

Mr. Garabedian stated that one of the past changes to the Charter was the Mayor's term reduced from four-year term to two-year term. The Council's term is two years.

Mr. Garabedian stated that his recommendation would be, any changes, be placed on the ballot at a full General Election rather than a special election because you would get larger voter turnout at the General Election. This Commission will be having public hearings and should be bringing in people for testimony and ideas, look at other City Charters. Invite department heads, who work under the Charter, for their opinions and get their input. Your main mission will be to study the Charter the way it is now.

Mr. Garabedian stated that the function of the Council is health, safety and welfare of the public and passing Ordinances, which are consistent with the Charter and State Law. The budget section of the Charter is one area of the Charter that has not been followed. He indicated that any sections of the Charter that state “editor’s note”, would require General Assembly validation.

Mr. Carrera asked if the Commission would have access to legal counsel. Mr. Garabedian stated that if legal questions or issues come up, he would recommend that the Chair of this Commission ask the Administration for Solicitor’s presence at the following meeting. He also stated that the Council legal counsel has been through a Charter Review Commission and could also be helpful if any questions arise.

Mr. Mulcahy asked Mr. Garabedian what he would suggest the first thing this Commission should do. Mr. Garabedian stated that the Commission should hold one or two public hearings to hear what people’s concerns are and then the Commission members might decide what the key issues are. He stressed that the Commission make sure the public hearings are advertised and publicized. He recommended that a packet be put together of some of the past Charter changes, whether they were passed or not. This information would be very helpful to the Commission members.

Mr. Garabedian stated that when the Resolution creating this Commission passed, it stated that the Commission has to report back to the Council within eleven months after its passage. If the Commission feels they need more time, it can request an extension from the Council.

Mr. Garabedian asked former Councilman Barone if he would like to speak. Mr. Barone welcomed the Commission members and stated that this is long overdue.

Mr. Garabedian stressed to the Commission to set up a vehicle to put together its own press release. Don’t be afraid to put out a press release. Mr. Mattiucci asked if this Commission has an advertising budget. Mr. Garabedian stated that the Council has not appropriated a budget. He feels an appropriate budget should be set aside.

Mr. Parente stated that since the Comprehensive Plan is being revised, he asked if there are any issues in the Comprehensive Plan that would impact on anything in the Charter. Mr. Garabedian stated that he does not believe so.

Mr. Garabedian and Councilman Lanni both stated that the first order of business should be to appoint a Chair and any other officers. Councilman Lanni asked if there were any nominations for Chair.

Mr. Notarianni nominated Mr. Mulcahy as Chair. Mr. Carrera seconded the nomination. No one opposed and Mr. Mulcahy was appointed Chair.

Chair asked for nominations for Vice-Chair.

Mr. D'Agostino nominated Mr. Notarianni as Vice-Chair. Mr. Mulcahy seconded the nomination.

Mr. Parente nominated Mr. Jackvony as Vice-Chair. Mr. Mattiucci seconded the nomination.

Mr. Notarianni relinquished his nomination to Mr. Jackvony.

No one opposed and Mr. Jackvony was appointed Vice-Chair.

Chair asked for nomination for Secretary. He stated that the Secretary would be responsible for getting press releases out and information out on the City's website and stated that this is a critical job.

Ms. Scripsack nominated Mr. Notarianni as Secretary. Mr. Mattiucci seconded the nomination. No one opposed and Mr. Notarianni was appointed Secretary.

Chair indicated that the next order of business would be to set a meeting schedule. He asked how often the Commission would like to meet. Mr. Mattiucci stated that two times a month is not unreasonable. The schedule could always be changed as we go along. Chair stated that it might be a good idea for the Commission to focus on particular chapters of the Charter per meetings. He asked for any ideas on what topics should be set for the next meeting. Mr. Carrera stated that the Commission members should read the Charter and weigh-in on what changes they feel should be addressed. Mr. Mattiucci suggested that the first step before going through the Charter chapter by chapter should be to develop an action plan.

Councilman Lanni stated that the Clerk suggested that the Commission members view past Charter Review Commission minutes to see how they handled their first meetings. He also indicated that the Clerk has indicated that most of the department heads are new with this Administration and they have not been familiarized with the Charter yet either. The only people who may be a help now are the Parks and Recreation Director, the Public Works Director and the Planning Director, who stayed from the previous Administration and Mike Igoe, the City Controller.

Mr. Jackvony suggested that everyone familiarize themselves with the Charter and discuss the two major chapters at the next meeting, then bring in at the next meeting, former Council President Garabedian and current Council members and School Committee members for their opinions. He also suggested that at some time, have Mr. Quinlan, the Council legal counsel, state to the Commission what State Laws contradict the Charter.

Mr. Carrera stated that in order for the Commission to be more productive, it needs to focus on specific chapters at the next meeting.

The Commission members agreed that the next meeting be held on Wednesday, January 28, 2009 at 7:00 P.M. and the items on the agenda to be “Organizational Meeting and Develop an Action Plan”.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees