

A meeting of the Pinellas County Charter Review Commission (CRC) (as created by Chapter 80-950, Laws of Florida) was held April 13, 2010, at the Mid-County Tax Collector's Office Training Room, 13025 Starkey Road, Largo, with the following members present:

Ronnie E. Duncan, Chairman
Ricardo Davis, Vice-Chairman
Diane Nelson, Pinellas County Tax Collector
Andy Steingold, City of Safety Harbor Mayor
Kenneth T. Welch, County Commissioner
James Angle
Gerald A. Figurski
William B. Harvard, Jr.
Melissa B. Jagger
Deborah Kynes
Raymond H. Neri

Not Present:

Ed Hooper, State Representative
Paul Bedinghaus

Also Present:

Susan Churuti, Attorney, Bryant Miller Olive, P.A.
Kurt Spitzer, Consultant, Kurt Spitzer and Associates, Inc.
Elithia V. Stanfield, Assistant County Administrator
Other interested individuals
Arlene Kennare, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

AGENDA

- I. Welcome
- II. Approval of Minutes
March 22, 2010 Meeting
- III. Public Comment
Audience
Website Submittals
- IV. Presentation - Elected County Mayor Form of Government
Linda Chapin, Former Orange County Mayor
John Wesley White, Former Sarasota County Administrator
- V. Issues Discussion
Future Charter Review Commissions

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- VI. Open Discussion
CRC Schedule
- VII. Adjournment

WELCOME

Chairman Duncan called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M., noted that a quorum was present, and welcomed those in attendance.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MARCH 22, 2010

Chairman Duncan presented the March 22, 2010 meeting minutes; whereupon, Mr. Figurski moved, seconded by Commissioner Welch and carried, that the minutes be approved as submitted (Vote 11 – 0).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Audience

The following people responded to the Chairman's call for citizens wishing to be heard:

Dot Miller, Unincorporated County (Seminole), re Annexation Notice
W.C. Snipes, Clearwater, re Jobs Lost/Annexation (presented paper)
Sally Israel, South Pasadena, re Fire and EMS Consolidation

In response to the recommendation of Ms. Israel that the Commission add consolidation of fire districts to its agenda, Commissioner Welch reported that consolidation would require legislative action and cannot be implemented solely by the CRC; that the previous CRC review updated the study prepared by MGT of America; and that a new study focusing on EMS is due in July and is different in that it is looking at fire transport; whereupon, Mr. Angle indicated that a group consisting of the county administrator, some city managers, fire district officials, and representatives from allied areas are working as a resource to the consultant doing the study.

Chairman Duncan related that he would like the Commission to contemplate a strong recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) regarding

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consolidation of the fire districts; whereupon, Mr. Davis responded that while the current financial crisis is forcing all governments to find ways to do more with less, only a strong grassroots push would force the issue; and that the credibility of the former report depended upon the viewpoint of the reader. Speaking from the perspective of the cities, Mayor Steingold stated that the majority of residents in his city are pleased with the fire department and do not complain about the cost; and that municipal officials will be open to the consolidation of the fire districts when it is shown that the service can be provided just as effectively for less dollars; whereupon, Mr. Neri discussed the political aspect of consolidation and the need for equality.

Website Submittals

Chairman Duncan pointed out that one website submittal is included in the agenda packet.

PRESENTATIONS

Elected County Mayor Form of Government

Chairman Duncan introduced the two featured speakers, noting that although they have different perspectives on the issue, both are highly regarded and have great credibility; whereupon, he indicated that Mr. Spitzer will provide an overview of the executive branch structure of county government.

Mr. Spitzer reviewed the practices and options available to the 20 charter counties in Florida, noting that only three have not retained the professional manager structure of government. He discussed the following five options for county governments to structure the delivery of service:

- County Commission Form
- Appointed Professional Administrator
- Elected Chair
- Elected Mayor
- Elected Executive

Mr. Spitzer indicated that while the election of a head of government would place him on par with other elected officials within the community and create a leadership position for the county on regional issues, it would diminish the role and responsibilities of the county commissioners. In response to queries by the members, Mr. Spitzer stated that if the proposed amendment in Hillsborough County passes, it would mean a strong elected executive

with veto power but would not eliminate the city mayor; that the Charter Review Commission could decide whether or not to give the elected official veto power; and that he is not aware of any studies comparing the effectiveness of the systems; whereupon, Ms. Jagger indicated that one of the Hillsborough commissioners had mentioned that one exists; and Chairman Duncan indicated that staff would provide the study if possible.

Linda Chapin, Former Orange County Mayor

Ms. Chapin related that there was a lot of support for a strong elected official in Orange County when it was put on the ballot in 1986, and it handily passed; that the county was dealing with explosive growth; that two thirds of the population and two thirds of the land were in the unincorporated county as opposed to the 13 cities and there was growing dissatisfaction with the delivery of urban services. She said that the citizens wanted accountability; and that they wanted to do away with the dodging and weaving of the elected officials about who was responsible when things went wrong. Ms. Chapin said that she was serving on the county commission at the time the amendment was passed, and ran for and was elected to the post two years later. She related that she hired a strong county administrator; and that the first years were difficult, as the county commissioners were asked to become a legislative and policy-making body instead of an administrative body, and they were reluctant to give up their power and influence.

Ms. Chapin indicated that the second four years went very smoothly; that the change led to a more efficient and more effective government; and that the accountability the people were looking for was provided. She indicated that the change provided a very clear economic development opportunity, as the business community highly approved of having one go-to official. Ms. Chapin indicated that she believes cities are destined to grow and that counties should not fight the growth of cities if there is managed growth that works to the benefit of the people, and described the working relationship she had with the city governments. In closing, Ms. Chapin emphasized that a strong administrator is necessary; and that veto power is a phony issue that should not be the determining factor since she neither had the power nor needed it, as everyone worked by consensus and collaboratively to deliver the services in the most efficient and cost effective way.

Questions & Answers for Ms. Chapin

Q What was the reaction of sitting commissioners following the change to the government structure?

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A *Following initial resentment of loss of salary and power, the commissioners focused on policy decisions and options. Along with the community, the business community, the cities, and the staff, the commissioners would now agree that the change was positive.*

Q Did the development community need to seek support from each commissioner for projects or only from staff and the elected county mayor?

A *The elected county mayor, but the Commissioners were encouraged to focus on policy, economic impacts, proper land use and efficiency, and to meet with everyone.*

Q Was the change revenue neutral?

A *Yes, through salary cuts of the commissioners. The commissioners who were grandfathered in kept their original salaries for the remainder of their term.*

Q Were there term limits for the commissioners?

A *Yes.*

Q Did the commissioners bring community issues to the elected county mayor?

A *Yes, at publicly noticed meetings. Everything was in the Sunshine.*

Q How did the budgeting process work?

A *The elected county mayor created and presented the budget and the county commission approved or made changes. There were always changes, but by and large there was an amicable consensus.*

Q Were you in the Sunshine?

A *Yes, we were totally in the Sunshine.*

Q Who had the authority to hire or fire the county administrator?

A *The elected county mayor, with board approval.*

Q Who did the mayors of the cities deal with before the change?

A *The chair of the county commission, and it was difficult. The change gave the county some parody in terms of negotiations, agreed-upon collaboration, and community projects.*

Q Was the office partisan or non-partisan, and was it a countywide election?

A *The election was countywide. The office was partisan at the time of change, and became non-partisan during my first term.*

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- Q Which can advance an agenda, such as rapid transit, more quickly, an elected county mayor or a county commission?
- A *The elected county mayor, because that is the one person who can go to the business community, the legislature, or a mayor of another city and negotiate.*
- Q Did single-member districts lead to greater parochialism as opposed to countywide districts?
- A *I would not favor single-member districts without a strong executive.*
- Q What was the reason the citizens decided they needed an elected county mayor?
- A *The citizens had enormous anxieties about growth.*
- Q As the elected county mayor, what was your relationship with the constitutional officers and the city mayors?
- A *The relationships were never perfect, but improved with an elected mayor.*
- Q What advantage do you see for Pinellas County to change its form of government, as it is pretty much built out?
- A *Among many reasons, leadership and accountability. When I took office, a survey of the citizens found that 35 percent of the electorate believed the county commission was taking the county in the right direction, and when I left, 78 percent said they believed it. The elected county mayor system increased the respect of the citizens for their local government.*

John Wesley White, Former Sarasota County Administrator

Noting that Mr. Spitzer had usurped much of his presentation, Mr. White related that he had worked in both forms of government; that he was the county administrator of Sarasota County for 10 years and the chief administrative officer of Prince Georges County, Maryland for four years, serving under the elected county mayor. He queried why Pinellas County would want to change its form of government since it has a good track record, noting that the right people can make any form of government work. Mr. White indicated that leadership and accountability are the selling points of the elected county mayor form of government, but there are no guarantees that you will not elect people with human foibles and managerial weaknesses; and that there are tradeoffs in how you gauge accountability. He recommended that the Commission focus on unintended consequences, including the diminution of authority of the county commission, and a pervasive atmosphere of personality of the elected county mayor; and pointed out that a mixed single-member and at-large-member system blends advantages of both.

In response to query by the members, Attorney Churuti advised that it would be difficult to put restrictions on the qualifications of an elected county mayor, as it may

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be unconstitutional, but should the Commission decide to pursue the issue, she would do the necessary research. She indicated that it is possible that term limits for the county commission could be put on the ballot.

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The meeting was recessed at 8:14 P.M. and reconvened at 8:20 P.M., at which time discussion continued on the elected county mayor issue.

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During discussion, the following information was requested:

- Identify cost involved; compare costs of an elected county mayor with the current county commissioner form
- Identify mechanisms available to keep revenue neutral
- Identify parameters/responsibilities of elected county mayor or strong elected official in other counties, i.e., veto authority, spending authority
- Identify the role of the elected county mayor and the remaining commissioners
- Evaluate effectiveness of one elected official versus seven members of the BCC
- Provide executive summary of the issue
- Provide a list of expected benefits

Discussion ensued wherein Mr. Davis questioned whether there is a need for a change in government in Pinellas County; and Mr. Figurski pointed out that from the information heard so far, it appears that a strong elected mayor would provide a focus for the county; and that it would be easier for the people of the community and mayors of the cities to work with an elected county mayor as opposed to dealing with seven county commissioners. Chairman Duncan stated that he is a believer in the status quo; whereupon, he related anecdotes from his term as chair of the county commission and stated that he found that being the commission chair carries no additional authority.

Commissioner Welch stated that while the cost could be dealt with, he would have to be convinced that the change would be to the good. He agreed that there are

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instances where having a collective body of seven complicates decision making; and suggested that if the change is made, it would still be necessary to have a county administrator; and that the elected county mayor would need the authority to do the job, including veto power. He related that the city mayors he has spoken with are in support of an elected county mayor; whereupon, Ms. Nelson stated that, as a constitutional officer, she has a very good working relationship with the county commission, which would make it difficult to support a change.

Mayor Steingold asked that the Commission not look at the issue as "if it's not broke, you don't fix it," but rather to ask where we are going in the future and whether the change would benefit the citizens in this county and the relationship between the county government and city governments; and pointed out that the county is losing industry and tourism; whereupon, Mr. Figurski asked that the city mayors weigh in on whether a strong elected county mayor would really make a difference in terms of negotiations. Discussion ensued wherein Mr. Davis observed that someone who could be elected to the position does not necessarily bring the ability to run a multi-million dollar enterprise; whereupon, Ms. Kynes noted that Ms. Chapin had stressed that a strong county administrator would still be needed.

Mr. Neri suggested augmenting what already exists by designating one of the countywide commissioners as chairman, with additional powers, and discussion ensued.

ISSUES DISCUSSION

Chairman Duncan related that at the next meeting, the discussion about the elected county mayor issue will continue, as well as the issues concerning future Charter Review Commissions, BCC term limits, and single-member districts; that there is an open slot in May; and that he recommends that the Commission soon vote on which issues to pursue and whether more information is needed. Ms. Nelson suggested that the Commission discuss an elected School Board chairman; and Mayor Steingold asked that the Commission discuss the sports and airport authorities.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Chairman Duncan noted that a new work program will be in the next agenda packet.

ADJOURNMENT

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There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 P.M.