

CITY OF SANDUSKY  
2015 CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

MARCH 3, 2015

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Dennis Murray **called the Charter Review Committee (CRC) meeting to order** at 5 p.m. and led the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

**Members present:** Donovan Cole, Talon Flohr, Darwitt Garrett, Andy Gudlach, Anthony Jones, Dan Kaman, Nicole Lloyd, Christine Mack, Mike Meinzer, Chris Parthemore, Mike Will & Conor Whelan.

**Members absent:** Dennis Feltner & Jennifer Washington.

**City staff present:** Eric Wobser – City Manager, Matt Lasko – Community Development Director, Angie Byington – Director of Neighborhood Development & Planning, McKenzie Spriggs – Administrative Assistant, Aaron Klein – Public Works Director, Don Icsman – Law Director & Kelly Kresser – Commission Clerk.

### **INTRODUCTIONS**

The members introduced themselves as well as the City of Sandusky staff members in attendance. Eric Wobser acknowledged the consultants who will be assisting with the Bicentennial visioning process and noted they will be available to help facilitate, research and draft documentation for the CRC members. They are: Alex Pesta and Kat Keller with City Architecture and Michael Graham with Strategy Design Partners.

### **WELCOME**

Dennis Murray said he regards today's meeting as one of the most important that will occur during his term as commission president. As a legislature, our most important, governing document is the city charter which, along with the laws enacted by Ohio's General Assembly, defines the actions that the Sandusky's government can take and how we are governed. You are in a very real way Sandusky's constitutional convention. That means that your work can be tremendously important, both for today's citizens and those in decades to come. You can shape the document that governs the commission. Or equally important, after giving the charter close consideration, you may provide assurance that it remains an effective document as is. We have had many fine charter review committees over the years. Dennis Murray said he has reviewed the available records of the most recent committees. Without hesitation, this is the finest group of CRC members the city has seen in decades. You also have the distinction of arriving at the task before you at a crucial turning point in the city's history. We have moved beyond decades of a starvation mentality when we were afraid to look at the future because it always seemed it would be bleaker than the present. In contrast, today we are a city that is beginning to embrace its future with confidence and excitement.

Dennis Murray also noted that the commission has encouraged itself to think of the CRC as its own farm team. Many past and present commissioners served first on charter review

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committees. We look especially to the younger members to consider serving your community in the future in other ways, including elected office. Like constitutions, city charters are meant to serve as checks and balances upon the government, to at least try to ensure that excesses are tamped down and that major changes are somewhat difficult, requiring that to do so we must have much broader consensus and extended discussion. So too it is with the case with the charter, which requires your approval, then two-thirds of the city commission, and then a majority of the voters. Big changes are never easy, nor should they be. To the extent that you consider major changes, you will rightly be part of the political process, subject to questions about how well informed you are and whether you have a personal agenda, and to challenge by citizens and stakeholders alike.

If you go about your work, I encourage you to keep several things in mind. First, think big. Think beyond the charter and outside the "box" that we built in the past. You might wish to take testimony if from law professors, elected office holders, other government experts and citizens alike. You may wish to look at how other Ohio cities have drafted their charters, and indeed at cities beyond Ohio. The point is that it is for you alone to decide your process, how you will conduct your meetings and whose voices and opinions you may seek out. As you do so, please keep in mind the question of whether the Sandusky of 2018 will be best served by a charter largely written in 1917.

Second, as you dream big, be smart. Keep politics in your mind. Politics is not a dirty word, but instead a measure of your rationality and realism, or what some have defined as the "art of the possible". You may well find, for example, that drafting a particular provision a certain way, effective at a certain time, may be the difference between a proposal being embraced or being dead on arrival. In that regard, feel free to consult with the current city commissioners to gain insights in terms of what might reasonably pass the commission, and to gain support for your proposals. I have no intention of offering you today a list of topics that I think are off-limits, or list of topics that I support for your consideration. All of that is your prerogative at this point in the process.

Third, reach consensus and listen to the wealth of experiences and backgrounds of your colleagues. You cannot listen with open ears but a closed mind. It is work to understand another's perspective, but the reward is understanding. Understanding may or may not lead to agreement, but it avoids disagreeableness and enhances the ability to reach agreement on other questions.

Fourth, if you have an agenda, check it at the door. You are not here to do your work, but that of the community which is counting on you to consider their interests and our interests, not your interests. My advice to you is that if you wish to become an effective part of this process, an agenda will only cost you credibility with your colleagues.

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Fifth, you have essentially four years in which to do your work. This committee has only two logical sunsets, that being when it finishes its work, or when the next CRC is appointed in 2020. Of course, any of your proposals must first be passed on to the city commission for approval by late July or the latest early August, and charter amendments can only be considered at the general election in the fall in order to be placed on the ballot. But none of this means that you must arrive at all of your conclusions within the next several months.

On behalf of the city commission, I thank you for your service, your energy and your enthusiasm for Sandusky. All of us on the commission look forward to considering the fruits of your work. Good luck.

Kelly Kresser asked if there were **nominations for Chairperson of the CRC. Upon motion of Mike Meinzer and second of Conor Whelan, the members voted to elect Mike Will to be Chairperson of the CRC.**

*Discussion:* Andy Gundlach asked what the criteria is for the Chairperson and Kelly Kresser said this person will chair the Charter Review meetings and ensure motions are properly voted on by following Robert's Rules of Order. Andy Gundlach asked if the Chairperson would also provide information to the media when necessary and Kelly Kresser said this would be up to the CRC members to determine if the Chairperson will act in this capacity. Similar to City Commission meetings, the President runs the meetings and the Vice President does the same in his or her absence.

**Kelly Kresser declared the motion passed.**

Kelly Kresser asked if there were **nominations for Vice Chairperson of the CRC.**

**Upon motion of Darwitt Garrett and second of Dan Kaman, the members voted to elect Mike Meinzer to be Vice Chairperson of the CRC. Kelly Kresser declared the motion passed.**

Mike Meinzer asked about minutes for CRC meetings and Kelly Kresser said she will serve as the CRC Clerk similar to how she serves for the City Commissioners. Kelly said she will prepare minutes for all CRC meetings and can be the person to direct questions or issues from the committee members to the staff. Most items are sent electronically and if anyone wishes for a paper copy, simply request it.

Mike Meinzer asked who is most well versed in Robert's Rules of Order. Dan Kaman said people should address the Chairman and not talk over others. Mike Meinzer said there may be committees to put together outside persons to address the CRC. Darwitt Garrett asked about the City Charter and Kelly Kresser said this document is available online, it can be sent electronically, or a copy can be printed.

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Kelly Kresser asked the members **how frequently they would like to meet** and on which days of the week. After some discussion, it was decided the CRC would meet on the first Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m. beginning April 7, 2015.

Mike Will asked if anyone took a stab at **reading the entire charter** yet and most indicated they had by a show of hands. Mike Will said there would probably be some confusion even if living with this document every day and it might be helpful to come to the next meeting to ask any questions about the document and identify who may have the answers between now and the second meeting. It was nice to be introduced and made to feel this is an important committee and could take as much time as necessary to request changes (or not); other CRC members may have felt rushed to make recommendations prior to the next election, but we do not have to if we do not want to. Andy Gundlach said he realizes there are a lot of other governments which operate in other ways, but he does not know how they function and suggested it might be helpful to hear from other comparable governmental entities such as Fremont or Findlay and get an idea what they do. Perhaps some professors or other outside persons might also be able to spur some ideas. Mike Will said after getting a better understanding of our charter, it might be helpful to have questions answered about those things we would like to know more about from others. There are a couple of different structures for municipal governments (strong mayor with a council, or a city manager with a council) and they may run on different structures with each of these platforms and it might be helpful to learn more about them.

Mike Meinzer asked if there are any other older versions of the Charter and Kelly Kresser said the sections with dates in parenthesis at the end note the timeframe of the updates. Conor Whelan said this does not show how the section may have read before. Mike Meinzer asked what the thought process might have been for the amendments and Kelly Kresser said she is sure this information exists, but not in one particular place. Don Icsman said the CRC started in 1989 and documents regarding changes made would be easy find in order to learn the thought behind them, but prior to that, they would be more difficult to locate.

Mike Meinzer said it is awesome to see young people here and getting involved and hopes it may lead to other things.

Conor Whelan asked if anyone knows of other municipalities that have governments which seem to be effective as their Charters would most likely be available online as well. Chris Parthemore said in doing our homework, anyone can reach out to other governmental entities.

Mike Meinzer asked how we know which sections might be good to copy from other entities and how to figure out what everyone values and thinks is important. Conor Whelan said as a place to start, just finding out what is out there would be a good idea. Christine Mack said there are 87 sections to the city charter and there may be bits and pieces from other governments with similar structures that may make sense for us to implement in part and thinks it is worthwhile for everyone to read the charter and look into one similar sized

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community that might have some interesting aspects or facets to it as there are no bad ideas. Andy Gundlach said he would also like to hear what others in our community think are good ideas and people should be invited in an open forum. Darwitt Garrett said the last CRC did this and also had experts speak about two different forms of government and this was effective and educational. Chris Parthemore said getting the public input at the front end is important. Darwitt Garrett said it is important to sell recommended changes to the commissioners and they then sell these to the public. Mike Will said there are different ways to garner public opinion (newspaper articles, audience participation), and asked Dan Kaman what he found to be the most useful. Dan Kaman said the Chairperson should tell the media what will be addressed at upcoming meetings and knowing the topic, people may show up for or against different proposed changes. We can then have an open discussion with the public giving their views.

Eric Wobser said one of the benefits of the Bicentennial visioning process provides is we intend to do a community survey to garner public input and they can build any questions into the survey as requested by the CRC. This will not be a scientific survey, but we will do our best to get several hundred responses. There will be a 90-day community engagement phase during the spring and early summer. Mike Meinzer asked if the CRC members would feel it beneficial for Eric Wobser to address the group at their next meeting to explain how the city is administered from the commission down and how the job gets done. Eric Wobser said Don Icsman and Kelly Kresser can coordinate with him about this because of their experience. Mike Will said there seems to be a consensus to do this with an aim of hearing from the public and others about municipal governments. Between now and April 7, we will read the charter and come up with questions to be discussed prior to our next meeting, or email questions for discussion to be shared. We will also hear from the city staff at the next meeting to explain to the CRC members how our government is working for us today.

Mike Will said he would like the CRC to be focused and head in the right direction and may spend some time with each of the members to see what would be a good way to stay on task and get a schedule of events for upcoming meetings. Kelly Kresser said she will prepare and distribute electronically a draft of the minutes after each meeting to review for the next meeting and will also put an agenda together for the next meeting.

Conor Whelan asked what two thirds of seven is as a commission majority as this is what it takes to make a Charter change by the City Commissioners and Mike Will said more than four, or five.

Dan Kaman said recently, when the Fire Chief was hired, Commissioner Naomi Twine handled this and believes all questions from the media should be handled through the Chairperson of the CRC. Mike Will said he is fine with this as it seems everyone is agreeable with this. Christine Mack said she thinks using one person, one voice, will help the citizens to help and support what the CRC is doing.

**REMARKS**

Eric Wobser said the diversity in this room is incredible and he believes this committee is reflective of the City of Sandusky and thanked everyone for serving. The staff members are available as necessary during this process for feedback and research. The larger Bicentennial visioning process is beginning next week after the commission meeting and asked the team to talk a little about their role in this process. This will help us to reflect what type of city we would like to have during the next 200 years as well as to implement the strategic vision and comprehensive plan. We have a unique opportunity to bring professional planners to the table and make them available as a resource.

Michael Graham with Strategy Design Partners said this is important work and is a time sacrifice for everyone. The timing is great they are working for a plan for the Bicentennial during the time the charter is being reviewed and these can be parlayed together to get some synergy between them to determine what the public would like to see for the future. The charter is a tool for the city to get where it needs to be and he can help by supplementing with additional information which may not have otherwise been available. They are looking at best practices and what is best for Sandusky based on looking at what others are doing. A lawyer should not necessarily be able to interpret every word of the charter but we should ask if this language really communicates with the people. Mike Will said to be clear, answers to questions such as different styles of city management can be referred to Strategy Design Partners and Michael Graham said they can help with this process by doing research.

Alex Pesta with City Architecture said this is a rare opportunity and commended the city for putting these two things together. The CRC can be streamline future changes and the visioning process which is all part of the Bicentennial plan. Big changes are never easy and this speaks both from the policy side and from the physical planning side and those involved will be challenged to determine what will work and what will not to develop a plan that will work with everyone. City Architecture has no agenda for this; they are here to help facilitate, answer questions and adopt and put a plan into action.

**Upon motion of Chris Parthemore and second of Dan Kaman, the members voted to adjourn at 5:56 p.m. The Chairperson declared adjournment of the meeting.**

**The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7 at 5 p.m.**

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Kelly L. Kresser, CMC  
Clerk of the City Commission

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Michael J. Will  
Chairperson