

Dennis Murray **called the meeting to order** at 5:02 p.m. after the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

**PRESENT:** Jeff Smith, Wesley Poole, Dennis Murray, Dick Brady, Scott Schell and Julie Farrar. Naomi Twine arrived at 5:07 p.m.

**City staff present:** John Orzech – Police Chief, Don Rumbutis – IT Manager, Sally Poggiali – Senior Accountant/Auditor and Kelly Kresser – Commission Clerk.

**Charter Review Committee members present:** Mike Will – Chairman, Mike Meinzer – Vice Chairman, Nicole Lloyd, Conor Whelan, Donovan Cole, Talon Flohr, Christine Mack, Chris Parthemore, Andy Gundlach, Darwitt Garrett and Dennis Feltner.

Dennis Murray said a verbal report will be presented tonight by the Chairman of the Charter Review Committee. In the past, this information has been distributed via written report, but if two commissioners wish to make a motion to move forward, they can do so this evening. Dennis Murray said it was interesting to research some of these issues and Sandusky was one of the first twenty cities in Ohio to adopt the manager/commission form of government. We need to be thinking as boldly as the city officials one hundred years ago who went from a strong mayor form of government to forming a Charter commission; a Charter was subsequently presented and adopted in 1914.

Mike Will, Chairman of the 2015 Charter Review Committee, went through each of the meetings of the committee and recapped progress made at each. The members were greeted on March 3 by Dennis Murray who stated the city is at a point where it is embracing its future with confidence and excitement and the members took this to heart. The first meeting allowed members to get to know each other and elected a Chairman (Mike Will) and Vice Chairman (Mike Meinzer). Agendas were set for future meetings and Kelly Kresser said she would be acting as the Clerk. There was a strong initial desire to learn more about how other governments work and what others in the community think. The members were given the charter to read and think of questions moving forward.

The second meeting was held April 7 with a presentation by Eric Wobser - City Manager, about the different city departments and divisions and an organizational chart was provided. Don Icsman also attended and distributed the Ohio Municipal League Sourcebook which was a great guide detailing rights as a charter city and the different forms of government in Ohio. Don Icsman took the time to clearly define the role of the members of the Charter Review Committee. Ultimately it is up to the City Commission which issues will be placed on the ballot. A Charter worksheet was distributed which was helpful at a later meeting. The members then brainstormed by putting many ideas on the table which could potentially be changed to improve the charter. This was a great starting point and provided a sense of what additional information is needed to make a good decision. Don Icsman advised it is illegal to have residency requirements regardless of what a municipal charter states. Don Icsman also advised each section would need to be a separate ballot issue if recommended for change. It was decided two experts would be brought in to share information about the different forms of government in Ohio to educate the members. It was also decided to host a public forum and invite the general public to share their thoughts as a result of this session.

The third meeting was held April 21 allowing the public to share their thoughts and ideas about what had already been discussed as well as any other thoughts and ideas they may have. Those who attended presented various ideas and feedback, in addition to members of the Charter Review Committee discussing these ideas with others in the community, members of their families, etc.

The fourth meeting took place on May 5 and the group went through each of the 87 sections to determine whether to talk about any of them further for change; these were narrowed down to 16 sections upon which to focus. Additional information was received from Andy Gundlach specific to the costs for placing a ballot issue in an odd year versus an even year. Odd-year

ballot issues cost significantly more than ballot issues in an even year. This was considered as the members moved forward with their discussion.

The fifth meeting took place on May 19 with Dr. Lawrence Keller – Cleveland State University/Levin College and Dr. Stephanie Walls – Bowling Green State University/Firelands College, who provided a joint presentation specific to the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four local forms of government in Ohio (Strong Mayor [elected to run and manage the city], Weak Mayor [elected to run parts of the city with other elected officials managing others], City Manager [appointed by elected officials to run the city] and Commission Plan [almost never used in Ohio now]). Both Dr. Keller and Dr. Walls were neutral on each form and did an excellent job in presenting information. There was also discussion about wards versus at-large representation and city formation and power. Mike Will said Dr. Walls stated she had read our charter and was surprised at how weak Sandusky's City Manager (position) is and it appeared every decision had to be run by the City Commission. Mike Will said Dr. Keller mentioned in many places the City Manager appoints more people. A Model City Charter was distributed by Dr. Keller from the National Civic League which is a guide on how local municipalities can run their cities and provides recommendations on style and format. There was also discussion about ethics, training for elected officials and the frequency of charter reviews.

The sixth meeting took place on June 2 and the 16 sections identified for discussion were narrowed down and addressed in more detail. Motions were made in the form of recommendations to be made to the City Commission specifically for Section 3 (Term Limits), Section 6 (Pay Increase for City Commissioners), Sections 17 & 18 (strike and have the Law Director and Finance Director report to the City Manager), Section 25 (Expenditures over \$10,000), and Section 87 (Charter Review timing). Most of the members felt solid about all six of these recommendations.

The seventh meeting took place on June 9 and it was apparent by the end of this meeting it might not be in order to make all six recommendations. Everyone had a chance to individually choose which of these six recommendations were most important to them. After this exercise, it was very clear Sections 17, 18 and 25 were the top three in order of importance. Sections 87, 3 and 6 were fourth, fifth and sixth in order of importance. Michael Graham, who had done work with the city's strategic plan, was asked to research some of these items with other cities for discussion at the next meeting. An eighth meeting was scheduled to finalize these recommendations and determine how to present them.

The final meeting was held on June 23 and Dennis Murray attended; Dennis shared his thoughts about changing the size of the commission from seven members to five members. Those present had good dialogue about this, but came away feeling like there are good reasons to change this, but it would be nice to see what happens with other recommended changes first. This was not brought as a final recommendation although one worthy of consideration. A motion was passed to strike Section 87 (Review of Charter) and to strike Section 6 (Pay Increase for Commissioners) from further discussion; the sentiment was pay is not the reason many choose to run in the first place and a few hundred dollars a year would not encourage someone to run. A motion was made to strike Section 3 (Term Limits) from further discussion and this had a lot to do with public input and how popular the current term limits are. This has served as a tool to get a wide variety of people on the commission over the years. A motion was then made to make a formal recommendation to the City Commission regarding Sections 17 and 18 and the reporting relationship for the Law Director and the Finance Director (changing to the City Manager rather than the City Commission). It was also determined a specific recommendation would not be made regarding Section 25 (Expenditures) although it is important. It did not seem like it was a good time to loosen the reigns on expenditures while at the same time the public is giving the city more money. Ultimately, Sections 17 and 18 were recommended for change and "new" draft language for these two sections, as prepared by Michael Graham, was distributed. The new language requires "the City Manager, with the concurrence of the majority of the members of the City Commission, shall appoint a Law Director who shall at all times be licensed and in good standing to practice law in the State of Ohio and who shall hold the office at the pleasure of the City Manager." The language to

change Section 18 regarding the Finance Director was similar. The language in both sections require the concurrence of the majority of the members of the City Commission. The data collected by Michael Graham was for 26 Ohio cities with a City Manager form of government with populations of 15,000 – 40,000. Of these 26 cities, ten appointments for the position of Law Director are made by the City Manager; three are made with City Commission approval; the Law Director is elected in two of these cities; in the other eleven, the Commission appoints the Law Director. For the position of Finance Director, the City Manager makes this appointment in 14 cities; the City Manager with Commission approval in six cities; one city chooses their Finance Director by election; and appointments are made in five by the City Commission. The Model City Charter prepared by the National Civic League states the best way is for the City Manager to make appointments to these positions although they acknowledge it can work different ways from city to city and is not perfect for everyone.

Mike Will said the members appreciate all of the issues which are now under consideration by the City Commissioners and will remain for questions. Dick Brady asked about the misconception we are tossing out a check and balance by changing Sections 17 and 18 as he thinks this might be a big concern with the electors. Mike Will said this was a concern of the members as well and they did not want to throw things out of balance. This would make it so the commission can focus on one person who has to produce results. The current form of government could actually be coined as a “weak City Manager” form right now. There is a City Manager who we expect a lot of, but who is not given the authority to carry this out. However, with great authority comes great responsibility, and this person would be responsible to make sure all aspects of the city are run properly. This currently is a little off as the City Manager is responsible for the financial aspects of the city and for the budget. The city also has the ability to engage with outside counsel and get a second opinion. The members were a little more comfortable with the structure of the existing Audit/Finance Committee as a check and balance and in the way it functions. Nicole Lloyd said for the initial checks and balances, these appointments also have to be approved by the City Commission so they still have a say, along with the City Manager. Wesley Poole asked which authority the City Manager does not have currently which this change will bring about and said the Finance Director and Law Director are currently held accountable by the City Commission. Mike Will said there are a lot of things that would change, but the most solid one is this would bring the opportunity for consistency. There are seven elected individuals who present individual ideas; it is tough to get seven persons with individual ideas together and move in one direction. This would help to move management of the Law Director and Finance Director in one direction and shift responsibility to the City Manager. When the City Commission tells the City Manager to perform specific tasks, he or she now has the ability to make sure the Law Director and the Finance Director are with him or her. This makes a world of difference. In the business world, when it comes to making sure things happen and progress, independent reporting relationships of the CEO do not work well. Naomi Twine asked Mike Will’s opinion about this from his perspective as having served as the City Manager. Mike Will said he supports the notion this change will create consistency and it would have when he was the City Manager. Looking back, it would have been nice for him to have known these were people working to solve the problems at the same time as he was and this is not the case when they do not report to the City Manager. Dennis Murray said this has nothing to do with personalities and there are no problems with the current individuals in these positions nor anyone Mike Will worked with. This is a systemic change being suggested. Mike Will said the members had to remind themselves it does not matter whether people like those serving in these positions currently or not, this is an institutional change. Julie Farrar said she relates to where we are going with this and she feels like the commission finally has consistency at this table after serving for almost eight years. All of the commissioners want to move forward and progress and this is consistency. Mike Will shared a quote attributed to Mark Twain: “Good decisions come from experience; experience comes from making bad decisions.” Mike Will said the commissioners have to decide what side they are on and if they are about to make a good or a bad decision. Scott Schell said we are at a point in our history we are moving forward with one vision and one voice and agrees with the comparison to our current system with the “weak City Manager or Mayor” scenario. Scott Schell said these are similar to how we are now and moving forward, if we want to keep on track and on focus with our vision and with one voice, this change will help the community. Wesley Poole asked how much public input

there was and Mike Will said there were six or seven persons at the public forum and each of them spoke. Their ideas were at odds with each other. Chris Parthemore said in addition, everyone on the committee sought input from friends and family and it was evident during every meeting they were speaking to others after each meeting. Dick Brady said this is not such a bold move and what Mike Will and the members are proposing is similar to how the city selects a Police Chief and a Fire Chief. Mike Will said to keep it simple, what is being proposed is actually less than this. There is not a committee making a recommendation to the City Manager, it is simply the City Manager making the recommendation to the City Commission, without a committee.

Dennis Murray said he is leaning in favor of what is being recommended and one of the strongest arguments for him is the Model City Charter as published by the National Civic League. They have significant collective wisdom and very strongly recommended a unified executive and he has come full circle with this. Dennis Murray thanked Mike Will and all of the Charter Review Committee members. The city began to have a revolving door at a point in time when we went from seven commissioners to five commissioners. If the Sections pertaining to the City Commissioners were ballot issues, they would be done in such a way so as not to affect the current Commissioners; rather, they would affect future candidates. Dennis Murray said this has been a very interesting process and appreciates the dialogue. The Commissioners have until early August to pass issues for the November ballot and he would expect to have more dialogue at the first meeting in July.

Mike Will offered assistance from the members of the 2015 Charter Review Committee for any issues which may be placed on the November ballot.

**Upon motion of Julie Farrar and second of Wesley Poole, the commission voted to adjourn at 5:55 p.m.**

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Kelly L. Kresser, CMC  
Clerk of the City Commission

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Dennis E. Murray, Jr.  
President of the City Commission