

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
Wednesday, February 8, 2012 – 8:00 a.m.
6th Floor Conference Room
Council Office Building

Commission Members Present:

Molly Mahoney Matthews, Chair
Mark Feinroth, Vice-Chair
Jeannie Cho
Diane Nash Dillon
Wendell Holloway

Thomas King

Albert Pearce

Staff:

Marc Hansen, County Attorney
Marie Jean-Paul, County Council Staff
Amanda Mihill, County Council Staff

Guests:

Linna Barnes, League of Women Voters of
Montgomery County

Commission Members Absent:

Mariana Cordier
Guled Kassim
Jerry Pasternak

Commission Chair Molly Matthews called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

I. Presentation by Linna Barnes

The Commission met with Linna Barnes from the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County regarding the general issue of the structure of the County Council. Ms. Barnes referred to the League's fact sheet on the subject and provided the Commission with a brief history of the Council structure. Ms. Barnes explained that the League's position that the Council should continue to have 9 Councilmembers and that there should be a mixture of at-large and district members. The League did not take a position on the specific composition on the Council, but Ms. Barnes noted that the two most popular choices were a 5 district/4 at-large and 8 district/3 at-large system. In response to Commissioner questions regarding the rationale behind the League's position, Ms. Barnes explained that the League did not feel that there was a compelling need to change the composition, the number of Councilmembers worked well given the committee structure, and that members were concerned about the increased cost and office space requirements that adding Councilmembers would require.

Ms. Barnes described the advantages and disadvantages of district and at-large Council districts. Regarding at-large districts, Ms. Barnes noted the advantage that the at-large members look at the good of the entire County rather than focus on one portion of the County. One drawback Ms. Barnes noted was that it was more expensive to run in an at-large district. Regarding districts, Ms. Barnes noted that district members tend to be more constituent-oriented than at-large members. Additionally, Ms. Barnes noted that typically, it is easier for minorities to get elected in districts. However, Ms. Barnes noted that in Montgomery County, it is more

difficult to draw lines to favor minorities because minorities are not concentrated in one area of the County and minorities do not tend to form political coalitions. Ms. Barnes noted that it might be possible to draw lines to favor minorities in the County if there were a larger Council.

Responding to Commissioner questions, Ms. Barnes stated that the League did not discuss whether the Council President should be separately elected by County residents.

II. Administrative Items

The Commission unanimously approved the minutes of the January 11 meeting.

III. Open Discussion of Potential Issues

Commission members discussed several issues that have been presented to them. The Commission decided not to pursue the following issues: changing the number of Councilmembers and/or the composition of at-large and district members; removing the fire tax from the Charter §305 property tax limits; and adjusting the budget deadlines in the Charter.

Regarding the issue of collective bargaining and the authority of the Executive to fund the bargaining contracts, the Commission agreed to wait until a final court decision in the pending lawsuit between the unions and the County before pursuing the issue.

Regarding the issue of having a 4-year Council President elected by County residents, Commission members requested Staff solicit Councilmembers input. Commission members were also interested in pursuing the issue of removing a Councilmember by a vote of 6 members for a serious violation of the Ethics law.

The Commission agreed to immediately study the issue of allowing a special hiring authority for people with disabilities. Commissioners agreed to ask representatives from the County's Equal Employment Opportunity Office to attend the March Commission meeting to provide the Commission with information about the County's hiring practices. Commission members also asked Staff to look at the legislative history for the federal Schedule A program for pertinent information.

Commission members also requested that Staff contact Councilmembers and invite them to speak to the Commission.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.