

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
Wednesday, October 12, 2011 – 8:00 a.m.
6th Floor Conference Room
Council Office Building

Commission Members Present:

Molly Mahoney Matthews, Chair
Jeannie Cho
Diane Nash Dillon
Wendell Holloway
Guled Kassim
Thomas King

Pamela Mason

Jerry Pasternak
Albert Pearce

Staff:

Justina Ferber, County Council
Marie Jean-Paul, County Council
Amanda Mihill, County Council

Guests:

Councilmember George Leventhal
Patty Vitale, Office of Councilmember
Leventhal
Bob Drummer, County Council

Commission Members Absent:

Mark Feinroth, Vice-Chair
Mariana Cordier

Commission Chair Molly Matthews called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

I. Administrative Items

The Commission approved the minutes from the September 14 meeting, with typographical changes. Motion made by Guled Kassim and seconded by Thomas King. The minutes were approved unanimously among those present.

II. Open Discussion of Potential Issues

Commission members reviewed the list of potential issues that have been raised. These issues include:

- Provision to encourage the Board of Education to comply with the Maryland Open Meetings Act
- Allow a special hiring authority for people with disabilities
- Increasing the size of the Council by 2 district members
- Abolish Council districts
- Prohibiting County employees from holding outside employment

Commission members discussed whether to study the issue of a special hiring authority for people with disabilities and agreed that a briefing on this issue would be beneficial. Commission members suggested that any speakers outline the obstacles facing people with

disabilities who desire County employment and address whether people with disabilities can bypass current County hiring practices.

Commission members also discussed the issues proposed that would restructure the Council and decided to group these issues together. Some Commission members felt that comments from advocates of increasing the size of the Council or the number of Council districts might not be as beneficial as testimony from an objective party about the pros and cons of various Council structures. Staff will reach out to the League of Women Voters to see if they will provide a briefing.

Commission members agreed not to further research prohibiting County employees from holding outside employment at this time. Commission members felt that the current process that required employees to receive Ethics Commission approval for outside employment was sufficient.

III. Meeting with Councilmember George Leventhal

Commission members met with Councilmember George Leventhal. Responding to Commissioner questions, Councilmember Leventhal stated that he was satisfied with the current Council structure; especially the four at-large representatives. Councilmember Leventhal further stated that he would support a charter amendment to provide for a special hiring authority for people with disabilities and that he did not support any Charter amendments related to collective bargaining.

Councilmember Leventhal raised two issues for the Commission's consideration. First, Councilmember Leventhal suggested the Commission consider adding a phrase to Charter Section 118 regarding the removal of Councilmembers to state that a Councilmember can be removed by a vote of six Councilmembers for a serious violation of the Ethics Law. He noted that this could avoid the problem Prince George's County had with a Councilmember who was found guilty of a felony but could not be removed from office until sentenced.

Councilmember Leventhal also raised the issue of property tax limit in Charter §305, which limits the growth of the property tax revenue to the rate of inflation without a unanimous Council vote. Councilmember Leventhal questioned whether the fire tax should be exempted from this §305 limit and noted that the annual fire tax collection is almost equal to the amount budgeted annually for fire and rescue services and programs in the County budget.

Chair Matthews suggested that both issues – fire tax exemption from the property tax limit and Councilmember removal for a serious ethics violation – be scheduled for discussion on the Commission's November agenda. Staff will start scheduling speakers on various issues. Staff will advise the Executive of the various issues before the Commission so that he can speak to them when he attends the November meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 a.m.