

City of Reading
2013 Charter Review Commission
November 13, 2013
6:00-8:00 p.m. City Hall

The meeting of the 2013 Charter Review Commission was held on Wednesday, November 13, 2013 at the Penn Room, City Hall, 815 Washington St., Reading, PA. The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Chairperson Rosemary Frank-Vitale.

Members of the Commission present were: Rosemary Frank-Vitale, David M. Cituk, John Slifko, Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz, Vaughn D. Spencer, Thomas Anewalt, Anne Sheehan, Michael H. Reese, Donna Reed and Frank B. Denbowski.

Members not present were: Carl Geffken.

Also present was Ernie Schliegel, John Spirk Jr, Solicitor for the City of Bethlehem, Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk, Eron Lloyd, Charles Younger, Paul Janssen, Charter Review Commission Facilitator and Carol R. Lewis, Recording Secretary.

Minutes - Motion by D. Cituk second by J. Slifko and unanimously carried to accept the minutes of October 30, 2013 with some typing corrections and additions to those people present.

Public Comments/Visitors – Ernie Schliegel attended the last Council meeting to oppose any member of Administration or Council being appointed to this Board. He felt that people from other Boards and Commissions should be appointed for more citizen participation. He also commented on the Mayor's ability to hire. He feels the Charter is clear regarding the Position Ordinance and that people should not begin before they are approved. Lastly, he suggested term limits of 2 or 3 terms to get more people involved.

Receive and Approve Bills: Motion by D. Cituk second by J. Slifko and unanimously carried to approve the bills for the Reading Eagle for a total of \$806.

Presentation from the City of Bethlehem: John Spirk Jr explained that he has been the City Solicitor for Bethlehem for 10 years. Bethlehem is a 3rd Class City with Home Rule Charter with option one. They are a Mayor/Council form of government. He is the City solicitor and the Council has their own solicitor who acts as an advisor to them. This system has worked out well for them. There are 2 point of views and they each respect that. They have had judges become confused as to who is representing the City, usually in zoning cases but the law is clear that the City Solicitor is the one representing the City. He explained that currently the City solicitor is picked by the Mayor and confirmed by Council. Council could however change the way the City solicitor is picked if they so choose. He explained that their system is not much different than when Council hires an outside attorney to advise them, Bethlehem has simply chosen to institutionalize the dual solicitors. He does not feel that having two solicitors has kept them out of court, that it is more a fact of the culture and their willingness to work things out. They discussed the fact that the solicitor does not do policy, he does law and how sometimes they also act as negotiators for their respective parties. Their solicitors are part time salaried positions with benefits. The Charter Commission discussed how to have the public make an informed decision

on the matter as the perception is that there is a high cost of securing outside representation when it is needed. It was suggested that they need to hone in on the language regarding the solicitor and keep it simple but tweak it. They discussed the current process for dispute resolution.

List of Categorized Charter Issues: The Board discussed which items on the list were Charter amendments and which could be handled by Ordinance. They also discussed possible processes by which the Charter could be reviewed more frequently and were in agreement that there are too many issues to wait 10 years to look at it again or address those issues. It was pointed out that the Charter Review Board has to be convened by Council. In regards to the dual solicitor, Administration has withdrawn their request that this be considered. The Board would really like to know what Council's position on the matter is. D. Reed said she would make sure it was discussed at their next meeting.

Presentation of Ballot Process: The Board discussed how many votes they should get and whether or not to take off Ordinance issues. They were cautioned that if they sent the Ordinance issues to Council, Council may decide not to act on them. It was decided to leave all items on the ballot at this time. Motion by M. Reese second by A. Sheehan and unanimously carried to vote 7 times for Charter amendment issues and 3 times for Ordinance issues, votes to be submitted electronically to P. Janssen by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 19, 2013. P. Janssen explained that he will confirm the votes back to the voter to make sure they are accurate. He will send the ballots via e-mail so all you have to do is respond to the e-mail. He explained that members do not have to vote for 7 different issues, they can put all their votes on 1 issue if they feel strongly about it.

New Business – The Board decided that they will meet next week, November 20, 2013. E. Lloyd will advertise it.

Public Comment – None to note.

Motion by T. Anewalt second by V. Spencer and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol R. Lewis
Recording Secretary