

Minutes

Local Governance Study Commission
December 3, 2019 - 6:00 pm
Public Works Conference Room (Room #352), 3rd Floor City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

Commission Members Present: Dr. David Branch (Co-Chair), Steve Berlin (Co-Chair), Gayle Anderson, Kismet Loftin Bell, John Cocklereece, Dr. Jack Fleer, Katie Hall, Cynthia W. Jeffries, Jeannie Metcalf; Absent: Rev. Alvin Carlisle, Ed Hanes

City Staff Present: Lee Garrity, City Manager; Angela Carmon, City Attorney; Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager; Meridith Martin, Assistant to the City Manager; Scott Tesh, Office of Performance and Accountability Director; Frank Elliott, Deputy Marketing and Communications Director

Others Present: Jeff MacIntosh, Northwest Ward Council Member; Bill Bell, former Mayor of Durham; Robbie Perkins, former Mayor of Greensboro; Mr. Metcalf

1. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Co-Chair Steve Berlin asked if any members of the Commission had proposed changes to the November 5, 2019 minutes. Dr. Jack Fleer made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was duly seconded by Ms. Cynthia Jeffries. The members present unanimously approved the minutes

2. Presentations from Former Mayors in Other Jurisdictions

- a. Bill Bell (former Mayor of Durham, NC)
- b. Robbie Perkins (former Mayor of Greensboro, NC)

Mr. Scott Tesh introduced former Mayors, Mr. Bill Bell and Mr. Robbie Perkins. Mr. Bell was elected Mayor of Durham and Mr. Perkins was elected Mayor of Greensboro.

Mr. Bell's experience included several years serving as a County Commissioner of Durham County. In 2001, he ran for Mayor in Durham and served in that capacity until 2017. The structure in Durham was seven members, including the Mayor. All members could vote and the body was nonpartisan. Mr. Bell explained that Durham has three districts and three at-large candidates. Council members served four year, staggered terms with elections taking place on odd years. The mayor served a two year term. The entire City votes for all seven positions.

Mr. Bell provided comments from his experience on the size of the council body and how elections work. He noted that in his opinion, the structure of districts and at-large works well. He stated that the Mayor's role is to conduct meetings and recommend individuals for committees. Mr. Bell said that the issues Durham faced were not partisan related.

Mr. Perkins served as a district City Council member in Greensboro from 1993-2005. Mr. Perkins served as an at-large member in 2007-2011 and served as Mayor from 2011-2013. He noted

that the Greensboro City Council consists of nine total members, three are at-large, five district representatives, and the mayor.

Mr. Perkins provide the Commission with is thoughts on governance structure. He noted that a board should remain nonpartisan because local government issues are not partisan related. Mr. Perkins served two-year terms and noted that the terms felt unproductive. Mr. Perkins stated that voters probably liked the accountability of two-year terms.

Ms. Katie Hall asked both speakers to address term lengths. Mr. Bell spoke to the importance of accountability with two-year terms, however, two-years provides little time for elected officials to accomplish goals. Mr. Perkins preferred four-year terms as an elected official.

Ms. Jeannie Metcalf asked about two-year terms in that it seems the first year would be working on accomplishments and the second year would be campaigning.

Co-Chair David Branch asked how long it takes a newly elected council member to become acclimated to the role. Mr. Perkins stated that one budget cycle allowed a newly elected official to become familiar with the role. Co-Chair Branch asked if there was any value in term limits. Mr. Bell noted that in his opinion, the constituent base knows if an elected official has done well in the role and will make the appropriate election decisions.

Dr. Fler asked both guests to comment on social media and how constituents use it to discuss decisions. Mr. Bell noted that he did not use social media, however, his colleagues used it heavily to communicate to citizens. Mr. Perkins stated that he uses Twitter frequently. Mr. Perkins added that social media seems to be the best avenue to reach young people.

Ms. Gayle Anderson asked about the importance of partisan elections. Mr. Bell noted that partisan allegiance depends on the issue.

Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell asked about Durham 'group campaigns' impact on elections due to at-large members. Mr. Bell noted that Durham is an activist community and endorsements play a role in elections. Ms. Loftin Bell asked if each guest's structure allows for demographic representation. Mr. Bell responded that Durham allows for representation. Mr. Perkins noted that voter turnout is vital for representation.

Ms. Loftin Bell asked if younger people are running for office in Durham. Mr. Bell answered that Durham has three members under 40 years old, which is a recent shift. Mr. Perkins responded that Greensboro has two under the age of 40. Mr. Perkins noted that the council member position is not as desirable as it once was. Mr. Bell added that pay for this position is another issue. Mr. Perkins stated that the struggle with pay is that the amount should not influence people to run for office. However, the position requires correspondences, coordination, appearances, etc.

Ms. Loftin Bell inquired if any other modifications should be considered by the Commission. Mr. Perkins noted the importance of community involvement.

Dr. Fleer asked if a nonpartisan board is a real thing. Mr. Bell stated that displaying partisan lines depends on the issues. Ms. Jeffries asked the importance of partisanship in elections. Mr. Perkins stated that a shift occurred in the last 10 years allowing for greater party involvement in elections. Co-Chair Berlin asked if either speaker would encourage moving to a partisan system. Both speakers responded no.

3. Discussion on Draft Resident Input and Feedback Strategy

Mr. John Cocklereece asked when the Commission would decide on a recommendation. He continued that in the timeline for a recommendation, the Commission needs to ensure input sessions are included. Co-Chair Berlin responded that the Commission is striving to complete the recommendation prior to the legislature going back into session in May. The recommendation would be provided to the local delegation and the local elected body.

Mr. Tesh led the Commission through potential input and feedback plan.

Ms. Hall noted that the video should be translated to allow inclusion in our community. Ms. Loftin Bell suggested adding a meeting to the southern portion of the city. The Commission discussed location options. Ms. Metcalf suggested using school facilities.

Dr. Fleer made a motion that the Commission would hold three total input sessions in various parts of the City. Ms. Jeffries seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

The Commission requested information on expenses related to elections.

4. Discussion on Receiving Feedback from Current City Council Members

Mr. Tesh explained the potential survey that would allow input from current elected officials.

5. Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 7, 2020 at 6:00 pm in the Public Works Conference Room on the third floor of City Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm with a motion by Ms. Katie Hall and seconded by Gayle Anderson. The motion was unanimous.