

# Minutes

Local Governance Study Commission

March 11, 2020 - 6:00 pm

Public Works Conference Room (Room #352), 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor City Hall

## CALL TO ORDER (6:02 PM)

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

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

\*Katie Hall participated in the meeting via telephone. This was allowed by the City Attorney and the Commission Co-chairs.

### 1. Approval of Minutes from February Meeting

*Co-Chair Steve Berlin asked if any members of the Commission had proposed changes to the February 4, 2020 minutes. Dr. Jack Fleer made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was duly seconded by Mr. John Cocklereece. The motion was unanimously approved.*

### 2. Review of Straw Voting Responses and Public Survey Responses

*Mr. Scott Tesh provided a presentation displaying results from more than 900 public survey responses. The presentation also included responses from City Council Members (six of nine responding) and straw voting results from the Commission (nine of eleven responding). Mr. Tesh provided information on the City's marketing plan for the public version of the survey, which relied heavily on social media (primarily Facebook), as data provided by respondents and from the survey site showed significant traffic coming from social media. Mr. Tesh responded to questions regarding the Council Member survey responses by reminding Commission Members that the responses were anonymous and therefor staff could not know which Council Members responded.*

### 3. Voting on Topics for Recommendations

*The following topics were addressed and voted on by the Commission:*

- a. At-Large Representation – Co-chair Steve Berlin opened the discussion by mentioning that more than half of survey respondents, City Council responses, and Commission straw voting showed in favor of adding more at-large representation to City Council. Ms. Cynthia Jeffries asked staff why the term “more at-large representation” was used in the*

survey given that there are no at-large members. Mr. Scott Tesh responded that the mayor is considered an at-large position on the elected board, and that “additional at-large representation” meant in addition to the mayor. Mr. John Cocklereece noted that the vast majority of other major cities in North Carolina had at least some at-large representation. Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell remarked that at-large positions might limit the “wardist mindset.” She also expressed that equity needed to be maintained in the total city, and expressed concern for the ability of potential at-large candidates’ monetary ability to compete for office. Co-Chair David Branch reminded Commission Members that the Mayor had charged the Commission with ensuring minority representation is not diminished in any recommendation and that any recommendation should serve all City residents. Discussion continued amongst several Commission Members regarding how at-large representatives might provide a city-wide approach to issues. The vote was called and passed: eight in favor of adding more elected representation and one opposed.

- b. Scenario for At-Large Representation – Dr. Jack Fleer opened the discussion by stating he was in favor of adding two at-large elected officials to the current structure, which would not diminish the ward perspective. Mr. John Cocklereece remarked that he preferred to keep the City Council the same size, which means converting current district seats to at-large seats, because it would be better for consensus building. Katie Hall asked what the cost of adding a new Council Member would be. Mr. Scott Tesh responded that the cost of salary and benefits for a new Council Members is approximately \$23,000 and the addition of a Community Assistance Liaison position to support two new members would be an additional \$80,000 or more. City Manager Lee Garrity agreed that adding two new council seats would cost in excess of \$100,000. Dr. Jack Fleer asked the current population per ward. Mr. Scott Tesh responded that each ward has approximately 31,000 residents. Mr. John Cocklereece remarked that district representatives in other cities represented far more people. Ms. Cynthia Jeffries commented that 10 council member is not an unwieldy number and that representing the current number was difficult for members. Ms. Gayle Anderson remarked that Council Members positions are part-time positions and sometimes Council Members forget that. She also stated she could be okay with council positions serving larger populations. Rev. Alvin Carlisle recommended adding two new at-large positions. He stated this would “maintain what citizens know but allow for at-large representation.” The vote was called and taken in three parts (those in favor of 8-2, those in favor of 6-2, and those in favor of 5-3): eight votes were recorded for the 8-2 split, one vote for the 6-2 split, and zero votes for the 5-3 split. Note: in the “splits” shown above, the first number is the number of district representatives, and the second number is the number of at-large representatives. The mayor would be in addition to those numbers.
- c. Council Member Term Length – Co-chair Steve Berlin noted that nearly 75% of the public survey responses and 100% of the City Council and Commission straw vote responses were in favor of maintaining the four-year term length. The vote was called: nine in favor and zero opposed to four-year terms.

- d. Mayoral Term Length – Co-chair Steve Berlin noted that a vote was taken at a previous meeting to make the mayoral term length equal to council member term length. He requested that an additional formal vote be recorded on the matter at this meeting. The vote was called: nine in favor of a four-year mayoral term length and zero opposed.
- e. Staggering of Terms – Co-chair Steve Berlin opened the floor for comments. Ms. Gayle Anderson commented that staggering terms might throw off the cohesion of the Council. Mr. John Cocklereece said he believed it was not necessary to vote every two years. Co-chair Berlin asking City Manager Lee Garrity about his opinion on staggering terms. The City manager responded that additional elections would further politicize normal events and that it usually takes a new elected official six months to a year to fully acclimate to the position. The vote was called: eight in favor of non-staggered terms and one opposed.
- f. Election Cycle (Odd v. Even Year Elections) – Several Commission Members commented on two factors affecting this potential recommendation. First, that odd year elections might allow local issues to play a more prominent role in selecting local elected officials. Second, voter turnout in even year elections is significantly higher. Dr. Jack Fleer asked if the survey provided any feedback on mid-term versus presidential year elections. Mr. Scott Tesh responded that the survey did not specifically ask that question, but that there were a few narrative comments suggesting one or the other. Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell also added the cost of purchasing political advertisements in even year elections was higher, which made it more difficult for local [government] candidates to get “enough air time.” The vote was called: five in favor of even year elections and 4 opposed.
- g. Partisan v. Non-Partisan Elections – Co-chair Steve Berlin opened discussion by noting that the mayors from other cities who had presented mentioned that party structure was known even in non-partisan elections, but that the mayors also remarked that many local issues were non-partisan in nature. Dr. Jack Fleer noted that the Commission had just voted to recommend an even year election cycle. He commented that “even year elections mean partisan elections.” Ms. Cynthia Jeffries remarked that residents currently understand the partisan method and having the partisan method provided at least some “base line” for understanding what a candidate might represent. Co-chair Steve Berlin stated that unaffiliated voters were a growing segment of the population and asked what percentage of voters were registered as unaffiliated. Mr. Scott Tesh responded that 31% of registered voters inside city limits were registered as unaffiliated. Rev. Alvin Carlisle remarked that changing the current system might decrease turnout or confuse voters. The vote was called: seven in favor of partisan elections and two opposed.
- h. Selection of the Mayor – Co-chair Steve Berlin noted this item had been voted on at a previous meeting but asked for another vote to be taken so that all recommendation votes could be recorded together. The vote was called: nine in favor of voters selecting the mayor and none opposed.

- i. Mayoral Voting – Ms. Gayle Anderson said she believed the mayor only voting to break a tie allowed him to do more consensus building, which seemed to work very well. Mr. John Cocklereece remarked that residents should know where the mayor stands on every topic and that his consensus building efforts shouldn't be hindered by having to vote. Ms. Cynthia Jeffries noted that the Commission was not voting on whether Allen Joines should have to vote but on whether all future mayors should have to vote. The vote was called: eight in favor of the mayor voting only to break a tie and one opposed.

4. Additional Public Feedback Session – Removed from Schedule

*Mr. Scott Tesh noted that the co-chairs had elected not to hold additional public meeting sessions. Co-chair David Branch said he believed the City Council should take the recommendations from the Commission and hold additional public input sessions at their discretion. He also noted the co-chairs intended to have a meeting with Mayor Allen Joines, Rep. Donny Lambeth (and Rep. Debra Conrad is she wished to be invited) to discuss recommendations and next steps.*

5. Final Meeting to Adopt Report – Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup>

*The final meeting was tentatively scheduled pending issues related to the coronavirus health issue.*

6. Adjourn

*The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm with a motion by Dr. Jack Fleer and seconded by Mr. John Cocklereece. The motion was unanimous.*