Winston-Salem Local Governance Study Commission

Final Report on Recommendations for Elections and Governance Structure

May 2020
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Executive Summary

The Winston-Salem Local Governance Study Commission (Commission) is an 11-member, non-partisan study commission created by Members of the North Carolina General Assembly and Mayor Allen Joines to initiate a review process of local elections and governance structure. The Commission was created after Members of the General Assembly filed House Bill 519 during the 2019 session of the General Assembly. House Bill 519 would have made significant changes in how the Winston-Salem City Council was structured and elected, including the creation of at-large seats on the City Council, changing mayoral voting rights, and shortening council member terms to two years.

The Commission was co-chaired by Steve Berlin, the managing partner of the Kilpatrick Townsend law firm, and Dr. David Branch, a local ophthalmologist and community leader. The Commission membership was comprised of experts in governance, neighborhood leaders, community activists, and other civic leaders, all of whom were residents of and/or business owners in Winston-Salem.

The Commission gathered information on topics related to their charge from subject matter experts in the fields of elections law and governance. This included presentations from Robert Joyce, Professor of Public Law and Government at the UNC School of Government, and Allison Riggs, Chief Counsel for Voting Rights at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice. The Commission also sought insight from experienced local government practitioners, former City Managers Jim Westmoreland (Greensboro, NC) and Roger Stancil (Fayetteville, NC and Chapel Hill, NC). The Commission also heard from former Mayors Bill Bell (Durham, NC) and Robbie Perkins (Greensboro, NC) in similarly-sized cities who had at-large council representation. The Commission also reviewed research on other cities in North Carolina on nine different dimensions of elections and governance structure.

The Commission held three public input sessions to educate residents on the charge of the Commission and to receive feedback on the elections and governance issues at hand. The Commission also created a public survey (non-random sampling therefore not statistically
significant) and received more than 900 responses to the survey in online and paper format. The Commission also polled the Winston-Salem City Council on their opinions.

The Commission took votes on nine topics related to local elections protocols ultimately recommending only one change to the current structure: the addition of two at-large city council seats. The Commission’s recommendation for this change was taken in two votes. The first vote was recorded 8-1 in favor of having more at-large representation on City Council. The second vote was 8-1 in favor of adding two new seats, as opposed to converting current ward (district) seats into at-large seats. The following report provides additional details on the charge, information gathering phase, public input and education process, and official votes recorded on the matters before the Commission. The appendix includes approved minutes from their meetings as additional reference.
Report

Background

The Winston-Salem Local Governance Study Commission was created by North Carolina State House Representatives Donny Lambeth and Debra Conrad and Mayor Allen Joines to initiate a review process of local elections and governance structure. The Commission is an 11-member, non-partisan study commission charged to review best practices relative to municipal governance structure, obtain public input as to the type of structure desired by the citizens of Winston-Salem, and analyze any potential impacts or consequences of proposed changes.

The Commission was created after local Members of the General Assembly filed House Bill 519 during the 2019 session of the General Assembly. House Bill 519 would have made significant changes in how the Winston-Salem City Council was structured and elected. Specifically, the bill did the following:

- Replaced the current system of 8 council members, all elected by wards, with a new system of five members elected by wards and three members elected at-large,
- Shortened Council Member terms to two years from four years,
- Required the mayor to vote on all items at council meetings, and
- Changed the process for filling vacancies on the City Council between elections

New ward lines included in the bill would have had the effect of placing three African American, female Council Members in the same ward. In response to concerns raised by local officials and residents about the scope of the changes, Representatives Lambeth and Conrad reached an agreement with Mayor Joines to withdraw the bill and jointly form the Commission to evaluate potential changes for electing the Mayor and City Council members.

The study commission was co-chaired by Steve Berlin, the managing partner of the Kilpatrick Townsend law firm, and Dr. David Branch, a local ophthalmologist and community leader. The remaining members were comprised experts in government, neighborhood leaders, community activists, and other civic leaders, all of whom were residents of and/or business owners in Winston-Salem. A full list of Commission Members is provided in the table below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>General Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve Berlin*</td>
<td>Partner - Kilpatrick Townsend Law Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. David Branch*</td>
<td>Ophthalmologist, Community Activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle Anderson</td>
<td>Former President of Local Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kismet Loftin Bell</td>
<td>Professor - Forsyth Tech and Surry Community Colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Alvin Carlisle</td>
<td>President of Forsyth County NAACP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Cocklereece</td>
<td>Partner - Bell, Davis and Pitt Law Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jack Fleer</td>
<td>Former Chair of WFU Department of Politics and International Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie Hall</td>
<td>Business Development Manager - Vela Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Hanes</td>
<td>Former Member of NC General Assembly/Lobbyist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia W. Jeffries</td>
<td>Neighborhood Leader; Owner - Jeff's Shared Treasures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannie Metcalf</td>
<td>Former Member of WS/FC School Board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates Commission Co-Chair  
1Information provided by Mayor’s Office for general purposes

**Official Charge to the Commission**

As indicated in the paragraphs above, the Commission was charged with reviewing elections methods and governance structure. The official charge to the Commission was provided by Representative Lambeth and Mayor Joines at the Commission’s first meeting on September 5, 2019. That official charge included the following items and notes:

- The Commission should review governance structures in other similarly-sized North Carolina cities to determine if other structures might better suit Winston-Salem's governance needs.
- The Commission should review different representation methods, including at-large representation, to ensure adequate representation for all citizens.
- The Commission should be mindful of not diminishing minority representation.
- The Commission should take into account geographic representation.
- The Commission should ultimately make recommendations to establish a form of government representation that serves citizens well.

No time limits were placed on the Commission in gathering the necessary information, holding public input sessions, or making recommendations. Any recommendations for changes were to be provided back to both the Local Delegation of the General Assembly and the Mayor and City Council.
Information Gathering

The first several meetings of the Commission were used to educate Commission Members on the current governance structure for the City of Winston-Salem, options for restructuring or modification, and legal ramifications of certain decisions. At the first meeting, Mr. Robert Joyce, Professor of Public Law and Government at the UNC School of Government, provided a presentation on the legal framework for changing city election methods. Mr. Joyce explained that the General Assembly has the authority at any time to make changes to any city’s charter and can override any local action. He also explained that in North Carolina there are four methods under which a city can change its own charter – authority granted through N.C.G.S. 160A-101. These include different combinations of action taken by a city council and referendum processes. Those options pertaining to the Commission’s charge are listed below:

- Whether the terms of board members are to be two years or four years, or a combination
- Whether the terms of board members are to be staggered
- What the number of total elected officials is to be (between three and twelve)
- Whether elections are to be at-large or through districts, or a combination, and what kind of districts
- Whether elections are to be partisan or non-partisan, and if non-partisan, what kind of non-partisan election method
- Whether the mayor is to be elected by the voters or from within the governing board

At the Commission’s second meeting, Allison Riggs, the Chief Counsel for Voting Rights at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, provided a presentation titled “Constitutional and Voting Rights Act Considerations When Contemplating a Change in Governmental Structure.” Ms. Riggs reviewed legal considerations pertaining to Federal law, State law, and the State constitution. Specifically, Ms. Riggs discussed the Equal Protection Clause and 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, Article 1 Section 19 of the North Carolina Constitution, and Sections 2 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act. She provided outcomes for several court cases and discussed how those precedents have been applied to changes in municipal governance structures elsewhere, particularly in matters related to at-large and district representation and the abilities of communities of interest (e.g., minority populations) to select preferred candidates.
In addition to Ms. Riggs’ presentation, the Commission reviewed information from the National League of Cities on at-large and district representation (which can be found on the Commission’s webpage) and reviewed in detail the language and effective changes in House Bill 519 (the bill language and bill summary can also be found on the Commission’s webpage). Staff also presented an analysis comparing the elections and governance structures of the eleven largest cities in North Carolina (comparison document can be found on the Commission’s webpage). The jurisdictional comparison highlighted the following information:

- Nine of the eleven cities had at least one at-large council member (other than a mayor).
- Nine of the eleven cities used some form of non-partisan election.
- Six of eleven cities used a four-year term.
- Four of the six cities using a four-year term also had staggered terms.
- The total number of elected officials varied from seven to twelve.

At the Commission’s third meeting, two former city managers from other cities provided their insights and opinions on the topics being considered. First, former Greensboro City Manager Jim Westmoreland provided commentary on Greensboro’s elections structure. Greensboro had five members from single-member districts, three members elected at-large, and a mayor elected at-large. Mr. Westmoreland explained that the General Assembly had written a bill during his tenure to move Greensboro to an all-ward structure very similar to Winston-Salem’s current structure. That law was overturned in a court case by the State Supreme Court and thusly never took effect. The second presenter was former Fayetteville and Chapel Hill Manager Roger Stancil. Mr. Stancil explained that during his tenure in Fayetteville, the city council structure moved from all at-large membership, to a mix of districts and at-large, and finally to all districts. These changes came about as a result of annexations and the creation of a task force to review city governance structure. During his tenure in Chapel Hill, all of the town’s council members were elected at-large.

The two former managers spoke in favor of a mix of district and at-large representation. Mr. Stancil mentioned that a format with too many at-large positions might diminish or erode the ability of minority and underrepresented populations to be part of decision making processes. Both mentioned that staggered elections and shorter election terms might provide additional accountability by allowing more frequent elections but that additional council turnover could pose...
issues related to strategic planning and election fatigue for voters. Both managers mentioned that a nine-person council was an appropriate size for a city the size of Winston-Salem. Mr. Stancil mentioned that district elected officials create additional workload for staff when compared to at-large. Both managers were asked about resident involvement in elections changes, and both remarked that it was very important to inform/educate, to gain feedback, and attempt to mitigate voter confusion.

At this meeting, the Commission also reviewed research on changes to municipal charters from other major cities in North Carolina. The information was requested to determine what changes had happened recently and who initiated those changes (local or through the General Assembly). The Commission also provided direction to staff on the number and format of public input sessions to be held later in the process. The Commission requested three sessions spread throughout the community where residents could ask questions and fill out a survey to provide direct feedback.

At the Commission’s fourth meeting, two former mayors from other cities provided their insights and opinions on the topics being discussed by the Commission. First, former Durham Mayor Bill Bell provided comments about his experience in the City of Durham, and he also provided comments from his time as a Durham County Commissioner. Mr. Bell explained that Durham (city) has three at-large and three district-elected officials; however, Durham uses residence districts, an election structure where the resident must live in the district but all qualified voters of the city elect the district representative. The second presenter was former Greensboro Mayor Robbie Perkins. Mr. Perkins explained that he had served on the Greensboro City Council as a district representative, an at-large representative, and as the mayor.

Both former mayors believed that a mix of district and at-large representation worked well by providing for geographic representation and city-wide representation. Both expressed that the total number of elected officials in their jurisdictions seemed to work well. Both mayors expressed that many local decisions are inherently non-partisan in nature but that voters tend to know the political affiliation of candidates even in non-partisan election processes. Both spoke on the advantages and disadvantages of two versus four-year term lengths. When asked about turnover, Mr. Bell responded that it takes six months for a new elected official to acclimate, and Mr. Perkins said it
takes at least one full budget cycle. Both said that monetary compensation can be a barrier to elected office. Mr. Perkins spoke of the role of council members as part-time board members in local government and the tendency for elected officials to assume a “full time role.”

Public Input Sessions
At its December Meeting, the Commission decided to hold three public input sessions spread throughout the community to gain insight from residents and to educate residents on the Commission’s charge. Three meetings were held the last week of January 2020, and the agenda for each meeting included an introduction from the Commission Co-chairs, an eight-minute educational video prepared by the City’s Marketing and Communications Department, and a “drop-in” style meeting platform where residents could ask questions, provide comments, and interact with Commission Members and City staff. The City’s Marketing and Communications Department created topic boards for each subject being reviewed by the Commission. The topic boards included items residents could consider when providing feedback to the Commission. Copies of the topic boards can be found on the Commission’s webpage. Meetings were held at the following locations:

- Carver High School – 3545 Carver School Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27105
- Easton Elementary School – 734 Clemmonsville Cir., Winston-Salem, NC 27107
- South Fork Elementary School – 432 Country Club Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27104

The public input sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes. Sign-up sheets were used to attempt to provide counts of participants; however, staff observed many participants refusing to sign in or skipping the process. Due to this, an accurate number of participants cannot be provided. Staff estimated that 25-50 participants showed up at each meeting. Several members of the Commission were present at each of the three meetings. The Commission Members interacted with residents and received input directly from residents during the drop-in session component of the meeting.

Survey Methodology and Results
The Commission also received input through a survey. The survey instrument is included in Appendix B. The Commission requested a survey be constructed to allow residents to provide input in a standardized format. The survey included seven questions and was constructed to
provide residents with easy-to-understand choices for each of the topics related to the Commission’s charge, as stated above in the “Information Gathering” section of this report. Each question asked if a change was necessary, and the response options included no change or one option for change – the only caveat being that three options were given in the sub-question related to structure. This was done to ensure the survey questions were not too complex or confusing. For instance, the question regarding election cycle timing asked if elections should be in even or odd years. It did not address presidential or mid-term election timing if an even-year cycle was selected. Paper copies of the survey were distributed at public input sessions, and an online version of the survey was posted to the Commission’s webpage.

Because the survey did not use a randomly-selected sample of residents (and thereby has self-selection bias in the sample), the results are not deemed statistically significant and cannot be generalized to the population at-large. There is also a chance for non-unique responses; however, respondent IP addresses were analyzed by City staff and suggested little evidence of multiple responses for the same respondents. The Commission received a total of 921 responses to the survey, 54 completed by hand and 867 completed online. The online version required a response for each question for submittal; however, some respondents filling out the paper copy of the survey chose to skip questions. For this reason, the sample value for each question is lower than 921. Summary results from respondents are shown on the following pages:
Question #1: The City of Winston-Salem currently has eight single-member districts (referred to as wards). City Council Members in wards are elected by voters in their ward. The mayor is elected at-large. At-large elected officials are elected by all voters in the city. Do you think having additional members elected at-large would be beneficial for carrying out City business?

Should There Be More At-Large Representation on City Council?

- Yes: 57%
- No: 43%

Question #1A: If at-large members were added to the City Council, please select the most desirable scenario from the choices below.

Preferred Structure If Additional At-Large Representation Is Added

- 8/2 Split: 57%
- 5/3 Split: 28%
- 6/2 Split: 14%

Note: The “splits” in the chart above reflect the number of district and at-large representatives, respectively. In all cases, the mayor was still to be elected at-large.
Question #2: City Council Members are currently elected to four-year terms. Do you think Council Members should be elected every two or four years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should Terms be Two or Four Years Long?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
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Question #3: City Council Members are currently all elected at the same time. Do you believe City Council Members should have staggered terms, meaning half of the Council is elected every four years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should Elections Be Staggered?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staggered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Staggered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question #4: City Council Members are currently elected in even years at the same time as many State and National elections. Do you believe City Council elections should take place in odd years?

![Pie chart showing 76% for Even Years and 24% for Odd Years.]

Question #5: City Council elections are currently carried out on a partisan basis, meaning that political affiliation (Republican, Democrat, etc.) is shown on the ballot and that partisan primaries take place in advance of the general election. Do you think City Council elections should be partisan or non-partisan in nature?

![Pie chart showing 60% for Partisan and 40% for Non-Partisan.]
Question #6: Currently, the mayor only votes to break a tie. Should the mayor be required to vote on all action items before the City Council?

![Pie chart showing 66% for voting on all items and 34% for voting only to break a tie.]

Question #7: Currently, the mayor is elected at-large by all voters of the city. Do you think the Mayor should be elected by the voters or appointed by the City Council?

![Pie chart showing 97% for elected by voters and 3% for appointed by council.]
Recommendations

At its March 11, 2020 meeting, the Commission reviewed the results from the public survey, along with results from a similar survey of current City Council Members (six of the nine elected officials responded). The Commission then reviewed each item related to their charge and voted on a recommendation for each item. Of the votes taken on each issue, the only recommendation to change a current practice prescribed in the City’s charter or State law pertained to district and at-large representation. The Commission voted 8-1 to recommend adding additional at-large representation to include two new at-large council members in addition to the current eight members elected by the ward structure. The recommendation provides for at-large representation on the council while preserving, to the extent possible, the current ward system of direct, geographic representation. Vote tallies on the other items can be reviewed in the minutes for the March 11, 2020 meeting in Appendix A.
APPENDIX A: OFFICIAL MINUTES FROM MEETINGS OF THE WINSTON-SALEM LOCAL GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMISSION
Minutes
Local Governance Study Commission
September 5, 2019 - 6:00 pm
Public Works Conference Room, 3rd Floor City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

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

Elected Officials Present: Donnie Lambeth, North Carolina House of Representatives; Allen Joines, City of Winston-Salem Mayor; Dan Besse, Southwest Ward City Council Member; Jeff MacIntosh, Northwest Ward City Council Member; John Larson, South Ward City Council Member; Annette Scippio, East Ward City Council Member

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; Aaron King, City-County Planning and Development Services Director

Others Present: Robert (Bob) Joyce, University of North Carolina School of Government; Wes Young, Winston-Salem Journal

1. Welcome and Introductions (20 minutes)
   a. Dr. David Branch
   b. Mr. Steve Berlin

   Co-Chair David Branch provided a welcome commenting on representation and diversity. Co-Chair Steve Berlin provided a brief welcome as well. Introductions were completed around the table.

2. Official Charge to the Commission (10 minutes)
   a. Representative Donny Lambeth
   b. Mayor Allen Joines

   Representative Donnie Lambeth provided a welcome and thanks to the commission. Representative Lambeth stated that Winston-Salem is different from other cities in the current election process. He asked the commission to evaluate best practices in communities throughout North Carolina and to review how elections are completed to ensure representation for citizens.

   Mayor Allen Joines also welcomed and expressed appreciate to the commission for their service. Mayor Joines noted that commission is balanced and diverse in an effort to represent the Winston-Salem community. Mayor Joines remarked that in 1948 the council-manager form of government was approved and following this, with growth, the City added wards. Mayor Joines stated that as this commission moves forward, three items should remain in mind – do not diminish minority representation, remember geographic representation, and establish a form of government representation that serves citizens well.
3. Presentation on Legal Framework for Elections and Re-districting (30 minutes)
   a. Robert (Bob) Joyce, UNC School of Government

   Mr. Scott Tesh introduced Mr. Robert Joyce providing information on his background and current focus area at the University of North Carolina’s School of Government. Mr. Joyce provided background on the School of Government and the type of resource the school is for local governments within North Carolina. Mr. Joyce stated that cities exist due to the General Assembly establishing a local act with a city charter. In time, all amendments to the act become part of the charter. Mr. Joyce then distributed a handout and led the commission through the information.

   Mr. Joyce stated that four routes are available in changing a city charter that can be completed by a municipality. A fifth route exists, however, this action must be taken by the General Assembly. Ms. Cynthia Jeffries asked if there is a priority in which route to take for action. Mr. Joyce noted that the fifth route used by the General Assembly has the most power. Ms. Jeannie Metcalf asked if the General Assembly could override any city initiated changes. Mr. Joyce noted that the General Assembly can override local changes.

   Mr. Joyce provided more details on the four routes of change available at the municipality level of government. He also noted that General Statute (GS) 160A involves municipalities in North Carolina. Ms. Jeffries asked if the School of Government has a chart to illustrate the structure of various municipal elected bodies in North Carolina. Mr. Joyce noted that a chart will be shown later in the presentation. Mr. Joyce described to the commission the options for charter changes without the General Assembly’s involvement (GS 160A-101) as well as the options for structure including at-large elections, districts, and combinations permitted for North Carolina municipalities (GS 160A-101(6)).

   Mr. Joyce remarked on the election type options for North Carolina municipalities (GS 160A-101(7)). Of all the municipalities in North Carolina, Mr. Joyce noted that only nine are partisan. Ms. Jeffries inquired if this has changed over time. Mr. Joyce responded that partisanship has changed, however, smaller municipalities are nonpartisan because elections are easier and cheaper. Mr. Joyce provided a state-wide summary of government and election methods for North Carolina municipalities followed by a summary chart of cities with a population of more than 200,000 people.

   Representative Lambeth added that in most municipalities the Mayor votes, however, in Winston-Salem, the Mayor only votes in the case of a tie. He noted that the Mayor of Charlotte has the authority to veto items being on agendas. Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell asked for clarification on nonpartisan elections and runoff elections with districts which Mr. Joyce provided. Ms. Jeffries asked from a School of Government perspective, are two year or four year terms better. Mr. Joyce responded that he had no opinion on the best method and was uncertain if a trend existed.

   Mr. Joyce provided his email address - joyce@sog.unc.edu.

4. Public Commission Requirements (20 minutes)
   a. Angela Carmon, City Attorney

   Ms. Angela Carmon continued the presentation with information and policies on Open Meetings in North Carolina. Ms. Carmon noted that this commission is providing an advisory function.
5. Meeting Schedule (5 minutes)
   a. Tuesday evenings recurring monthly

   Mr. Tesh noted that previous discussions with the Co-Chairs led to the possibility of Tuesday evenings as standard meeting time for the commission. Mr. John Cocklereece made a motion for the first Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm to be the commission’s meeting time until the work is completed. Ms. Katie Hall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

   Ms. Metcalf requested a list of commission members with contact information. Mr. Cocklereece asked if media requests should be deferred to the co-chairs. The co-chairs responded yes. Ms. Jeffries asked where the commission is beginning and ending, House Bill 519 or the entire city charter. Co-Chair Branch noted that the goal is to bring all commission members up to the same level with all the information available. Co-Chair Berlin added that the commission will review all of the options and determine what will work best for our city. Representative Lambeth noted that some areas the Mr. Joyce reviewed were not included in House Bill 519 such as partisanship. Representative Lambeth stated that the commission should review best practices in North Carolina to determine what is best.

6. Adjourn

   The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 1, 2019 at 6:00 pm in the Public Works Conference Room on the third floor of City Hall.

   The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 pm with a motion by Mr. Ed Hanes and seconded by Ms. Loflin Bell. The motion was unanimous.
CALL TO ORDER

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

Elected Officials Present: Jeff Maclntosh, Northwest Ward City Council Member

City Staff Present: Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager; Meridith Martin, Assistant to the City Manager; Scott Tesh, Office of Performance and Accountability Director

Others Present: Allison Riggs, Southern Coalition for Social Justice

1. Welcome

   Co-Chair Steve Berlin provided a brief welcome.

2. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meeting

   Co-Chair Berlin asked if any members of the committee had proposed changes to the September 5, 2019 minutes. Mr. 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.

3. Presentation: “Constitutional and Voting Rights Act Considerations When Contemplating a Change in Governmental Structure”
   a. Allison Riggs, Chief Counsel, Voting Rights Program, Southern Coalition for Social Justice

   Co-Chair Berlin introduced Ms. Allison Riggs from the Southern Coalition for Social Justice to discuss items that should be reviewed as this commission moves forward. Ms. Riggs covered topics including legal considerations outside of changing structure of government, federal and state constitutions. Ms. Riggs discussed the Equal Protection Clause and 14th Amendment of the Federal Constitution, Article 1 Section 19 of the North Carolina Constitution, and Sections 2 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

   Mr. Berlin asked if there were situations where a commission would draw district lines rather than an elected body. Ms. Riggs noted that in Asheville, the legislature wanted the municipality to redraw the district lines; however, Asheville decided not to use this model. Asheville used an independent firm. In the past, local bills only related to districting appeared with a consensus of the local elected body. Mr. Berlin asked the commission to consider the fact that if restructuring is agreed upon, would the commission draw the districts or allow to Council to complete this task following the census.
Mr. Fleer asked if there was a difference in United States Supreme Court and the NC three judge panel on gerrymandering in light of the Equal Protection Clause. Ms. Riggs responded that the US Supreme Court stuck with constitutional history whereas NC is more evolving.

Mr. Jack Cocklereece asked about the number of districts requiring 51% minority and what counts as a minority district. Ms. Riggs answered that districts must allow black voters equal opportunity to vote and select their candidate of choice.

Co-Chair David Branch inquired if any communities that have gone through this process previously been unsuccessful? Ms. Riggs noted that smaller towns have tried this through referendums without the buy-in of voters; however, this has not occurred frequently. Ms. Riggs typically works with communities trying to resolve a problem rather than a community being told there is a problem to resolve.

4. Review of Documents and Questions
   a. Jurisdiction Comparison
   b. National League of Cities District versus At-Large Information
   c. House Bill 519

Mr. Scott Tesh led the commission through the materials provided for this meeting. Ms. Jeffries asked staff to provide recent changes that have occurred with the municipalities included on the comparison information document. She also requested that any changes listed include a designation of how the changes were made (General Assembly or local change).

Co-Chair Branch asked if there is a trend for municipalities to move towards nonpartisan elections. Ms. Riggs responded that one or two municipalities have moved to being nonpartisan. She noted that it is less common to be partisan; however, she was hesitant to make a suggestion based on what other jurisdictions do.

Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell asked what changes have been made in the past by the General Assembly. Ms. Riggs stated it might be tough to determine because the local delegation could ask the General Assembly to implement a change, or it can be mandated.

Ms. Jeffries asked what the process would be as it pertains to House Bill 519. Co-Chair Branch stated that the bill is currently inactive; however, because it was discussed in the long session, it could be discussed again in the short session.

5. Additional Information Requests by Commission Members
   a. Presenters
      i. Elected Officials from Other Jurisdictions
      ii. Additional Professional Experts

Co-Chair Branch discussed potential future presenters to the commission. Ms. Gayle Anderson asked what happens when a decision is made by the commission. Co-Chair Branch responded that a report would be given to the City Council and ultimately the General Assembly would determine if the recommendations were acceptable. He noted that this commission serves in an advisory role. Mr. Fleer asked if local government staff from other jurisdictions could serve as presenters. Co-Chair Branch responded that this could occur but the staff would likely be retired.
Ms. Riggs suggested future presenters could also include election administrators because this group can discuss the implications of elections being partisan/nonpartisan and elections occurring on even/odd years. Ms. Riggs also suggested retired City Attorneys, Managers, and Budget Directors.

Ms. Katie Hall asked if additional reading materials could be provided that would benefit the commission for this process. Ms. Riggs suggested the National Conference of State Legislatures might have reading related to this. The National League of Cities might have information on redistricting. Co-Chair Branch stated that a redistricting would occur in 2021 due to the census. Ms. Riggs added that there would be more benefit in waiting on census data in 2021 for line drawing rather than using data from 2010.

6. Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 5, 2019 at 6:00 pm in the Public Works Conference Room on the third floor of City Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm with a motion by Mr. Fleer and seconded by Ms. Loftin Bell. The motion was unanimous.
Minutes
Local Governance Study Commission
November 5, 2019 - 6:00 pm
Public Works Conference Room (Room #352), 3rd Floor City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

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

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: Jim Westmoreland, Retired City Manager; Roger Stancil, Retired City Manager; Mr. Metcalf

1. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Co-Chair David Branch asked if any members of the committee had proposed changes to the October 1, 2019 minutes. Ms. Kismet Loftin Bell 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 City Managers in Other Jurisdictions
   a. Jim Westmoreland (Greensboro)
   b. Roger Stancil (Chapel Hill & Fayetteville)

Mr. Scott Tesh introduced retired City Managers, Mr. Jim Westmoreland and Mr. Roger Stancil. Mr. Westmoreland worked in Greensboro and Mr. Stancil worked in Chapel Hill and Fayetteville.

Mr. Westmoreland spoke to his experience in 2015 when Greensboro was the target of a bill from General Assembly proposing a scenario that Winston-Salem currently has in place now. The structure of Greensboro is eight council members, three at-large and five from districts, with an at-large mayor. The bill would alter the structure to eight council members, all from districts, and an at-large mayor. Greensboro’s original structure stayed in place. The City holds elections every four-years on odd years (2021 being the next election). The elected body is non-partisan.

Mr. Westmoreland noted that citizens appreciated the opportunity of voting for more representation because with the structure in place, one citizen was able to vote for the mayor, three at-large council members, and their district council member. The proposed bill would only allow the citizen to vote for the mayor and their district representative.

Mr. Westmoreland continued with a discussion on other representation topics. He stated that non-staggered elections have a risk of major turnover following any one election. Mr. Westmoreland noted that four-year terms allow elected officials a better opportunity to focus on
strategic City goals and priorities. Four-year terms also allow more opportunities to complete the designated goals. He noted that odd year elections have lighter citizen turnout. Mr. Westmoreland’s key note from the process he experienced was to obtain as much community input as possible because of the importance in determining the best option for Winston-Salem.

Co-Chair Steve Berlin asked Mr. Westmoreland to discuss the roles of at-large members. Mr. Westmoreland stated the at-large council members were more representative of the entire city rather than one specific area. All the members had one equal vote. The process of how each council member conducted business was not different.

Mr. John Cocklereece asked if anything related to elections changed in 2015. Mr. Westmoreland noted that elections moved to four-year terms.

Ms. Katie Hall asked if at-large campaigns are more expensive. Mr. Westmoreland noted the longer an individual has served on the City Council, the more name recognition the individual has within the community. This would allow the campaign to be less expensive.

Ms. Jeffries inquired if it is harder for a new representative to be elected. Mr. Westmoreland stated that candidates can be elected and if they are able to make an immediate impact, their name recognition grows.

Ms. Gayle Anderson asked if a sufficient number of candidates were available for at-large and district representation. Mr. Westmoreland noted that enough candidates were available for all the elections he experienced.

Co-Chair Branch asked if the non-staggered system caused any dysfunction due to the lack of continuity. Mr. Westmoreland answered noting the importance of city functions on the elected body for continuity. Anytime a change occurs to the elected body, the dynamic also changes. Co-Chair Branch also inquired if a light turnout for elections illustrated a less involved community. Mr. Westmoreland explained that with a smaller turnout, fewer votes were required to make change. Ten votes could determine a district’s representation.

Co-Chair Berlin requested Mr. Westmoreland expand on the dynamic of the Mayor voting. Mr. Westmoreland responded that all members have an equal voice with the opportunity to vote. He also remarked that the Greensboro community liked the Mayor having a vote.

Ms. Anderson asked if a commission was formed to improve the system in Greensboro, what the commission should review. Mr. Westmoreland answered that a commission should evaluate staggered versus non-staggered terms because Greensboro experienced major turnover.

Mr. Stancil spoke to his experience in Fayetteville and Chapel Hill. Mr. Stancil noted a city/town manager’s role in preserving and protecting the role of the elected body as a whole. In Fayetteville, the elected body consisted of an at-large council with a mayor that could not vote. The City transitioned to six districts, three at-large representatives, and a mayor that could not vote. Mr. Stancil noted that the mayor in this city preferred not being able to vote. With annexation, Fayetteville added three additional districts. At this time the elected body totaled thirteen members.
Fayetteville created a taskforce, which was initiated locally, to discuss how representation should occur. Following the evaluation, the City changed to nine total districts, no at-large representatives, and a mayor that votes. Mr. Stancil noted that the members held two-year terms, which felt like the representatives were constantly running for re-election.

Mr. Stancil continued with information regarding Chapel Hill, which has eight at-large elected officials and a mayor. He noted that the representation was equitable of different populations in the town.

Mr. Stancil closed by providing a few more viewpoints from his experiences. He stated that he had not seen an elected official use district representation as a progression to an at-large position. He noted that a candidate typically would choose the type of position (at-large versus district) with their mindset for representing the community. Mr. Stancil continued noting that district candidates have specific interests, which is illustrated by their focus on the district and at times missing the larger picture for the community as a whole. He stated that concerns could exist relating to underrepresented populations having a more difficult time being elected at-large. Mr. Stancil stated that an eight to nine member board felt sufficient. As more members are added, staff can struggle providing equitable time to all members.

Ms. Loftin Bell provided a few thoughts for the group of items to consider moving forward. She noted that the Commission should think about the Voting Rights Act and its impact on Winston-Salem history. How should the Commission approach at-large representation to protect the diversity of the City.

Ms. Jeffries asked the former managers about citizen engagement. Mr. Stancil responded that opportunities are provided through social media outlets and regular citizen surveys. He noted that meetings should be held in the community rather than at City Hall. He added that input should be received early in a process and feedback should be provided on how the input was utilized. Mr. Westmoreland answered that Greensboro used similar strategies.

3. Review of Research – Charter Changes in Other Municipalities

Mr. Tesh led the Commission through recent charter changes in other municipalities. Co-Chair Branch noted that this information provided the Commission with a good idea of the recent trend changes.

4. Discussion on Dates, Times, and Format for Public Input Sessions

Co-Chair Branch started discussion for public input sessions. Mr. Tesh provided ideas for the sessions, which included hosting one large public hearing in City Hall and/or multiple meetings in various locations within the City. Staff would need a month to adequately advertise the session(s). Ms. Loftin Bell stated that sessions throughout the community would likely be best noting that local churches could serve as hosts. She asked if a survey with a video explanation could be used.

Co-Chair Branch stated that receiving direction and interests from the community is important in an effort to make a recommendation for their representation. Ms. Anderson expressed concern if the input is open-ended format, few responses will be received.
Co-Chair Berlin asked how the Commission should educate citizens for better public input sessions. Mr. Tesh noted the use of the resident survey. Ms. Meridith Martin provided information on the bond education sessions held throughout the community in 2014 and 2018.

Mr. Hanes noted that current elected officials host meetings within their wards throughout the year and asked if these could be used for community input. Ms. Jeannie Metcalf noted the importance of a uniform message as the Commission moves forward. Mr. Cocklereece suggested that the input sessions provide options for community reactions.

5. Speakers for Next Meeting
   a. Current and/or former elected officials from other municipalities in NC

   Mr. Tesh noted that the next meeting would host speakers including the former Mayor of Durham and the former Mayor of Greensboro. Ms. Jeffries requested to hear from a representative from Asheville, if possible.

6. Ethics Training
   a. Angela Carmon, City Attorney

   Due to time constraints, ethics training was held until December. Mr. Tesh reminded the Commission to complete the Diversity and Sexual Harassment training.

7. Adjourn

   The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 3, 2019 at 6:00 pm in the Public Works Conference Room on the third floor of City Hall.

   The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm with a motion by Ms. Loftin Bell and seconded by Mr. Hanes. The motion was unanimous.

The next scheduled meeting of the Commission is Tuesday, December 3, 2019 at 6:00 in the Public Works Conference Room located in City Hall.
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. Fleer 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 Cocklerereece 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.
Minutes
Local Governance Study Commission
February 4, 2020 - 6:00 pm
Public Works Conference Room (Room #352), 3rd Floor City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

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

City Staff Present: 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; Mr. Metcalf

1. Approval of Minutes from December Meeting

Co-Chair David Branch asked if any members of the Commission had proposed changes to the December 3, 2019 minutes. Dr. Jack Fleer made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was duly seconded by Mr. John Cocklereece. The members present unanimously approved the minutes.

2. Ethics Training
   a. Angela Carmon, City Attorney

Ms. Angela Carmon led the Commission through a presentation on the City of Winston-Salem’s ethics policy.

3. Presentation of Input Received
   a. Debrief from Public Input Sessions
   b. Summary of Resident Input through Surveys
   c. Summary of City Council Input through Surveys

Co-Chair Branch thanked the Commission for the participation with the community input sessions. Mr. Tesh led the group through a presentation of the input received from the session. Mr. Tesh noted that 25-50 people attended each session, the format of each session was similar, and described the survey tool used during each session.

During the partisan conversation, Dr. Fleer asked if unaffiliated voters are the largest number of voters in the community. Mr. Tesh looked up the information and noted within the City of Winston-Salem include about 78,000 Democrats, 34,000 Republicans, and 51,000 unaffiliated voters.

Mr. Cocklereece asked if the article about term limits could be sent to the Commission.
Mr. Cocklereece inquired about the costs of elections. Mr. Tesh responded that in an odd years, the City is the only organization having an election causing a significant increase in cost. Even years, the municipal election information is at the bottom of the ballet, however, the cost of the election is split due to federal and/or state elections also occurring. Mr. Cocklereece asked about the cost difference between even years versus odd years. Mr. Tesh noted that odd years would cost $120,000-$140,000. Staff will find out the even year cost.

Ms. Jeffries asked if staff would continue to advertise the online survey for more input from the community. Mr. Tesh noted that staff would continue to advertise online. If the Commission would like to advertise more, staff will continue to do so. Ms. Gayle Anderson asked if staff could find out how attendees of the input sessions found out about the meeting. Ms. Katie Hall noted to add a direct link to the survey from social media. Ms. Jeannie Metcalf asked if media would run another story to assist with pushing the survey out to citizens. Ms. Anderson provided the idea of a letter to the editor of the Winston-Salem Journal from the Co-Chairs of the Commission.

Co-Chair Branch noted that trends of thought are helpful in the Commission’s decision-making process.

Ms. Jeffries asked what specific wards were ‘collapsed’ in the proposed House Bill. Mr. Tesh noted the lines were drawn by precinct districts.

4. Review of Topics for Discussion

Mr. Tesh reviewed the decision-point topics that the Commission can discuss and provide recommendations. Mr. Cocklereece noted that some items should be dropped as discussion points such as how the mayor is selected and mayoral terms. Mr. Cocklereece moved to remove these two items from consideration by the Commission. The motion was seconded by Ms. Anderson and approved unanimously. Mr. Tesh noted that the survey tool used for citizens could be distributed to the Commission to complete anonymously prior to the next meeting. Mr. Cocklereece asked if the March meeting’s goal is to finalize a recommendation from the Commission.

Ms. Jeffries asked if the Commission settled on a date to close the survey and suggested in the end of February. Mr. Cocklereece stated the survey close two business days prior to our next meeting. Ms. Metcalf made the motion to close the survey two business days prior to our next meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Anderson and approved unanimously by the Commission.

5. Additional Requests for Information
   a. Information on Odd-Year Election Costs
   b. Other Requests for Research

   The information was covered earlier in the meeting.

6. Potential to Change March Meeting Date
   a. Scheduled from Primary Election Day
Mr. Tesh asked if the Commission was open to completing a poll to select the March meeting date. The Commission responded affirmatively to use an online poll to select the next meeting date.

7. Adjourn

The next meeting, originally scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 6:00 pm in the Public Works Conference Room on the third floor of City Hall, has been cancelled due to Primary Election Day. A special meeting of the Commission will be held in March with the date to be determined.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 pm with a motion by Ms. Jeffries and seconded by Ms. Metcalf. The motion was unanimous.
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 therefore 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 on 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 7th**

   *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.*
APPENDIX B: PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY TOOL
SURVEY: CITY OF WINSTON-SALEM LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

1. The City of Winston-Salem currently has eight single-member districts (referred to as wards). City Council Members in wards are elected only by voters within their ward. The mayor is elected at-large. At-large elected officials are elected by all voters in the city. Do you think having additional members elected at-large would be beneficial for carrying out City business?

- There should be more at-large representation on the City Council
- There should not be more at-large representation on the City Council

If at-large members were added to the City Council, please select the most desirable option from the following scenarios:

- 8 members elected from wards, 2 members elected at-large, 1 mayor elected at-large
- 6 members elected from wards, 2 members elected at-large, 1 mayor elected at-large
- 5 members elected from wards, 3 members elected at-large, 1 mayor elected at-large

Please provide comments to your responses to question #1.

2. City Council Members are currently elected to four-year terms. Do you think Council Members should be elected every two years or every four years?

- Council Members should be elected every two years
- Council Members should be elected every four years

Please provide comments to your response to question #2.

3. City Council Members are currently all elected at the same time. Do you believe City Council Members should have staggered terms, meaning half of the Council is elected every four years?

- Council Members should be elected on staggered terms
- Council Members should all be elected at the same time

Please provide comments to your response to question #3.

4. City Council Members are currently elected in even years at the same time as many State and National elections. Do you believe City Council elections should take place in odd years?

- Council Members should be elected in odd years
- Council Members should be elected in even years

Please provide comments to your response to question #4.
5. City Council elections are currently carried out on a partisan basis, meaning that political affiliation (Republican, Democrat, etc.) is shown on the ballot and that partisan primaries take place in advance of the general election. Do you think City Council elections should be non-partisan in nature?

- [ ] City Council elections should be done on a non-partisan basis
- [ ] City Council elections should be done with the political affiliation on the ballot

Please provide comments to your response to question #5.

6. Currently, the Mayor only votes to break a tie. Should the Mayor be required to vote on all action items before the City Council?

- [ ] The Mayor should vote on all items before the City Council
- [ ] The Mayor should only vote to break a tie

Please provide comments to your response to question #6.

7. Currently, the Mayor is elected at-large by all voters of the city. Do you think the Mayor should be elected by the voters of appointed by the City Council?

- [ ] The Mayor should be selected by City Council from within its own membership
- [ ] The Mayor should be elected at-large by the voters

Please provide comments to your response to question #7.

8. Please provide any additional comments or feedback.

Thank you for time taking to fill out this short survey. Your feedback will be provided to the Local Governance Study Commission.