

City of Saratoga Springs Charter Review Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 24, 2001

- A. Human Resources Department to serve all City departments and employees.
- B. Conduct a comprehensive budget system.
- C. Require an annual audit.
- D. Inventory of City real and personal property.
- E. Capital and facility planning and implementation
- F. Adoption of uniform City policies and procedures.
- G. Improve intergovernmental relations.
- H. Restructured Planning and Economic Development.
- I. Develop uniform purchase policy and procedures.

Denise Polit said Commission members have renumbered and regrouped sections of the charter to make it more user friendly. She said proposed changes are to be budget neutral and if possible reduce the burden on taxpayers. She said there was an attempt to achieve savings to offset any possible additional expenditures and in many changes the savings will continue into the future B in other cases the savings are cost avoidance measures.

Denise Polit said Commission members also reviewed the County Supervisor position and have now required them to work closer with the City Council and represent City issues and positions at the county level. She said the Commission has reviewed the bidding process and attempted to streamline that process by raising the threshold on bidding and require competitive bidding.

Denise Polit informed members of the public that this is a public hearing on a set of proposed amendments to the City's Charter which were prepared by the Commission. She said a full copy of the proposed amendments is on the City's WEB page and on display at the Saratoga Springs Public Library as well as in City Hall. She said written comments on the amendments should be submitted to the Kathy Moran, Engineering Department, City Hall, 474 Broadway before noon on Monday, August 20, 2001.

Denise Polit said it was important for the public to understand that there is still time and opportunity to effect what will be in the final charter which will be voted on in the upcoming general election. She said the Commission's deadline for submission of the final version is September 6, 2001.

Denise Polit said there will be a transition period for some of the specific proposed recommendations, however, the overall document becomes effective in 2004. She explained though that the Commission understood that there would be some items that would take longer to implement. She said the effective date for specific items would be written into the charter.

Denise Polit said members of the Charter Review Commission were available this evening to answer any questions that might arise. She then opened the public hearing.

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Stephen Towne, candidate for Commissioner of Accounts, commended the Commission on their work. He said he had not yet read the charter, therefore, was only asking for clarification on a few items.

Stephen Towne said he understood that the Commission had proposed that the City now be required to submit to annual audits. He said he thought that was already being done. Denise Polit said in some cases it is true that the work is already being done, however, the Commission chose to add language to be more specific on the requirements and to also strengthen the process. Stephen Towne said in his estimation the most important part of the budget document is the management letter.

Stephen Towne said in his visits to homes in the City it seemed as though there was a concern expressed by many residents that politics in Saratoga Springs seems to be at an all time high. He said it also had been pointed out that both interdepartmental and intermunicipal cooperation is needed. He asked if the Commission had been able to address that issue. Denise Polit said the Commission had extensive discussions on nonpartisan elections, however, it was determined that it was not possible to return to nonpartisan elections. Chris Whann said it was his belief that politics is not evil and the voters now have the opportunity every two years to replace elected officials. He said the Commission tried to review the underlying process by strengthening the charter and being more specific in certain areas. He pointed out that in some cases the functions were not clearly defined. He said they believed that specificity would tighten the process and bring about interdepartmental cooperation.

Lew Benton said he would have preferred that the City go back to nonpartisan elections, however, it was not possible. He said we also need to recognize the external political forces on the Council. He said much of the blame is to be placed on the political leadership of this community. He said in some cases those leaders are more interested in politics and posturing than public policy. Stephen Towne said that may be true, however, the persisting comment is that the politics have reached a higher level. Denise Polit said that may be true, however, there is only a limited amount of things the Commission can do through the charter. She said there must be cooperation from the Council. Stephen Towne said he hoped that the more clarity would minimize the politics of the situations.

Mark Lawton said the City needs a more disciplined budget process. He pointed out that in the proposed charter, it had been so noted that if a Commissioner failed to do a specific item such as submitting a budget, than a figure could be added by other Council members. He said the City still needs unified policies and procedures though. Chris Whann said in many cases the Commission deleted the phrase "substantial performance" and has now required that Commissioners meet their specified obligations. Lew Benton said the Commission spent a lot of time trying to make the budget process more transparent and accountable. He said now, for instance, the Council will be required to have the proposed budget available for public review. He said the capital budget functions have also been expanded.

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Stephen Towne asked about the reference to professionals within the City. Mark Lawton said the Commission did not address the qualifications of elected officials, however, they did review the area of executive management. He said the Commission wanted to be sure that when hiring management officials that there would be some assurance that individuals with the appropriate skills and training were hired. Chris Whann said much of this would be handled under the Civil Service law. He said the proposed Human Resources Department would work in conjunction with the Civil Service Commission to ensure that the people with the right skills are hired.

Stephen Towne asked if there was a recommendation within the charter that would require that departments report back to the Council on the recommendations from the audit. Lew Benton said Commission members struggled with that issue. He said the City currently has a weak executive and they struggled with how to give the Mayor more control without abandoning the essence of this form of government. He said the Commission did find some language that gave the Mayor the ability to request a department to report on any particular subject.

Stephen Towne suggested that some thought be given to requiring that departments be compelled to report back to the Council on the recommendation of the audit.

Stephen Towne asked for the Commission's thought process on term limits. Chris Whann said the Commission discovered in their review of the City government that term limits was a solution to a problem that really did not exist in this City. He said since 1950 there have been only two or three individuals who have spent more than eight years in the City. He said the Commission discussed this issue, but found that the voters took care of it. Lew Benton said the Commission had many interesting conversations on term limits and length of terms and decided to leave it alone. He said Commission members believed that the public would make the decision on that issue through their vote.

Denise Polit suggested that perhaps Stephen Towne draft some language for the Commission on the management letter and his suggestion that Council members be required to report back to the Council on the recommendations from the audit.

Stephen Towne thanked the members of the Commission for spending their time in answering his questions.

Denise Polit said because there was no one else wishing to speak she closed this public hearing. She reminded everyone that written comments would be accepted at City Hall until noon on Monday, August 20. She said the following public hearings were scheduled:

- Tuesday, July 24, 7:00 p.m. (City Court Room)
- Wednesday, August 1, 10:30 a.m. (City Council Room)
- Thursday, August 9, 7:00 p.m. (City Council Room)
- Friday, August 17, 7:00 p.m. (City Council Room)

OTHER

Chris Whann reported that a few members of the Commission recently met with Patsy Berrigan, Civil Service, to discuss her recommendations on changes to the language and they agreed to make some minor changes. Chris Whann said it appeared that Patsy Berrigan was supportive of the Commission's recommendations.

ADJOURNMENT

Vassar Curtis moved and Chris Whann seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Ayes all. There being no other business, Denise Polit adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Moran
Clerk

Approved: