

2018 CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

September 12, 2018

Glasby Room, Saratoga Springs Public Library, 3:00 PM

Call to Order

Chairman DeLeonardis called the meeting to order at

Roll Call

Present: Vince DeLeonardis, Chairman
 Deputy Commissioner Michael Sharp, vice chairman
 Deputy Commissioner John Daley, Secretary
 Commissioner Michele Madigan
 Commissioner Peter Martin
 Deputy Commissioner Maire Masterson
 Commissioner Skip Scirocco
 Deputy Mayor Lisa Shields

Absent: Commissioner John Franck
 Deputy Commissioner Joseph O'Neill

Recording of Proceeding

The proceedings of this meeting were recorded for the benefit of the public and the secretary. Because the minutes are not a verbatim record of the proceeding, the minutes are not a word for word transcript.

Public Comment

Chairman DeLeonardis opened the floor for the first public comment session.

Bonnie Sellers, Fifth Avenue, Saratoga Springs, NY said that a couple of meetings ago the committee talked about the budget and how the committee would communicate with the public and several items were mentioned. She hopes that the updated charter will be mailed to every household. She understands that the committee is concerned about the cost and there is a tight budget, but she believes this is important to do because it shows the public that they are important, and this is an important issue that the committee has worked on diligently for the past several months. Also, if there is enough money in the budget, there should be an outline included that is logical and highlights and summarizes the document because many people are not going to read the entire document, so an abbreviated outline is important.

Seeing that no one else wished to speak, Chairman DeLeonardis closed the public comment period.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman DeLeonardis moved and Deputy Daley seconded to approve the minutes of the meetings of 8/28, 8/31 and 9/5.

There were no changes or additions.

Ayes all.

Discussion: Proposed Charter Activities

Outreach and Education

Chairman DeLeonardis noted that at the last meeting, September 5, the Committee voted to approve a five-member Charter and seven-member Charter, and those documents have been filed with the City Clerk with the report to the public and the proposed ballot questions as required; that obligation has been fulfilled. He reminded the committee that at the last meeting there was a conversation concerning the next steps in this process which is the education and outreach to the community and responsibilities were divided up among Commission members in regard to that. With the help of Trish, he has put together binders that contain the proposed Charters for both the five-member and the seven-member Councils with both clean and red-lined versions of each along with the announcement and a copy of the letter submitted to the City Clerk which outlines those documents. Two of the binders will be left at the Library and one will be at the Recreation Center. A fourth binder will be kept at the City Attorney's office as a template for additional binders for other locations we may deem appropriate. Based upon the recommendation of legal counsel as discussed at the last meeting, Chairman DeLeonardis put together a formal legal notice and an informal press release with regard to our filing of the document and indicating that both proposed Charters have been posted on the City's website for review and that hard copies can be reviewed at the Library and the Recreation Center so these are requirements of the process that have been met.

Chairman DeLeonardis said with regard to additional outreach and portions assigned to him, he is putting together a reader's view stating that the process of revising and filing the proposed Charters has been completed and between now and election day, the Commission will be reaching out to the community as part of our education and outreach effort and that article will be completed and submitted within the next several days. Chairman DeLeonardis stated that he was assigned to contact the VFW and their next meeting is October 10 at 7:00 p.m. and he has contacted them requesting to speak at that meeting. The American Legion has also been contacted and a former Commissioner of Public Safety, Frank Dudla is involved with them, so a message was left requesting time to speak at their next meeting. So far, he has not heard back from either organization. He also informed the Commission that the City's Democratic Committee has a meeting on October 6 and he will reach out to some contacts there and hopefully schedule a time to speak with them. He asked Commissioner Scirocco to reach out to the Saratoga Springs Republican Committee about scheduling time to speak to them.

Chairman DeLeonardis noted that throughout this process different entities and organizations have been identified as potential venues for education and community outreach and one organization reached out to the Commission. Success has scheduled a meeting at the Library on September 25 at 5:30 p.m. Chairman DeLeonardis said it is not necessary to have the entire committee present at these meetings but as more are scheduled, we may divide up the responsibility of addressing these groups among the Commission members. Chairman DeLeonardis said he also contacted Look TV to schedule a follow-up interview.

Deputy Sharp said that since he has had some interns from Skidmore, he reached out to his contact there that provides the interns, Bob Turner, to schedule an education forum. He is trying to include everyone and every group. Chairman DeLeonardis asked Deputy Sharp about his experience following the Face Book page. Deputy Sharp responded that some of the comments on Face Book appear to be from people that have not been following this process very closely because their comments expressed concern that this is a repeat of a process that was just completed and failed; a "here we go again" attitude. His response to those comments is to explain this Commission's purpose and intent, what has been done, and how our process and goals differ from the previous [2017] Commission.

Deputy Shields said she reached out to the Senior Center and they were apprehensive about any appearance that they were supporting or not supporting the proposed Charter. She understands that and offered that we might be doing some community forums. The contact at the Senior Center suggested that the best way to reach the seniors is through print media, such as the Penny Saver and Saratoga Today.

Chairman DeLeonardis said it is curious that some organizations are reluctant to host an information session for fear of being perceived as taking a side. We do want to be careful and make sure that we express to these organizations that this is not an opportunity to take a side. The forums are simply to educate the public about what is going to be on the ballot in November.

Commissioner Madigan said she reached out to the Lion's club and they felt the same way because they have had poor experiences in the past with people coming to speak about Charter change and the conversation had to be cut short because those education sessions drifted into advocacy. Consequently, they want to take it to their Board. She then described to them the very informative education session held at the Senior Center when the School District took their referendum on the road to explain the meaning and intent of the proposal and that piqued the interest of Lion's Club, but they still want to discuss it with their Board. She is not hopeful because their luncheon meetings are booked out a few months in advance.

Commissioner Scirocco said he spoke with Rotarian Dave Patterson and the Rotary has a policy that they do not want to bring forth anything that could be interpreted as political, so that is a firm "no". He also reached out to the Elks Club and their regularly scheduled meetings are on the first and third Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m., the same as the City Council meetings which would make it hard for a member of this Commission to meet with them. They did not say no but they were not sure how much of the membership would be interested in attending because they are the Saratoga-Wilton Elks Club with members from Wilton and Saratoga Springs. He could reach out to them again to determine if they are willing to hold a forum on a different night, but they just do not seem that interested.

Chairman DeLeonardis said he does not want to push it unless the organization is open to it and if they are, one of us could attend the meeting to briefly educate them on the referendum. Commissioner Madigan feels that the word is charged right now, as Deputy Sharp explained the reactions have been along the lines of "oh no, not this again". Deputy Sharp said there is a fatigue to this, based on how divisive the 2017 process was for City Hall, it seems as if it was the same for the City. Chairman DeLeonardis said that these reactions and comments highlight the importance of outreach education; we must educate the public as to the difference, the intent and the changes of this Commission from the 2017 Commission.

Deputy Masterson said she reached out to the Chamber and asked them to give us a chance to conduct a brief overview at their next meeting and she has not received a response but since she has a meeting at the Chamber building tomorrow, she will pop in and ask in person to try to determine their stance on the idea. Chairman DeLeonardis asked the Commission members to try to come up with other groups and organizations that might consider having us present an educational overview. He said that the Commission has discussed holding a forum at a public or civic venue to allow the public to come to us for a Q & A session. Deputy Sharp said that the Commission has held two forums so far, the first of which was very well attended, and the second one was lighter. Chairman DeLeonardis clarified that the first one was at the beginning of the process and the second one was toward the end but prior to the Commission's vote; and this one will be different because it will allow for public feedback and provide us the opportunity to clarify the proposed referendums. Chairman DeLeonardis asked the Commission if they agreed that such a public forum would be beneficial. He offered to run point on conducting the forum and he would work with the Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL) and the Saratoga Springs City Center (SSCC) to negotiate a small space to hold the forum. The Commission agreed that a public forum for educational purposes is a good idea.

The Commission discussed other options and ways to meet and educate the public including setting up a small table at the Farmer's Market, which might require permission from the Farmer's Market. Commissioner Scirocco said that if the table is set up on City property, near the market, permission is not

necessary, and it could be set up on a couple of Saturdays. Deputy Sharp offered to man the table; Chairman DeLeonardis asked him to find out what is required since it may be beneficial to be in the center of the market. Commissioner Madigan suggested going door to door. Deputy Sharp suggested that since we are having issues getting to people, he supports the idea of inviting people to come to the Commission's public forum; the key is to reach as many people as possible.

Print Media

Chairman DeLeonardis said that previous discussion at the last meeting led to the suggestion that we have a pool of money that is better utilized by sending out multiple mailers to cover the issues and point to the City's website for more information. He said to speak to Bonnie Sellers' point, the Commission has prepared two full Charters, a five-member and a seven-member draft and, given available funds, we are prohibited from mailing both full Charters, although it is a good idea, we do not have the available funds.

Deputy Sharp said that he and Commissioner Madigan outlined the project as the development of three mailers that contain a high level of information and also point to the City's Website and other sources as well for more details. They received a proposal from Miles Ahead Communications for between one and three 6" x 11" postcard mailings to educate not advocate, noting that the messaging is to be developed by the Commission. He explained that in the proposal the number of mailers is 20,000; the number is the big question mark in the proposal; there are roughly 11,000 parcels in the City but that does not narrow down the number of residents. The Post Office bases the number of residents by zip code and the 12866 zip code includes Wilton as well as Saratoga Springs. Commissioner Madigan said that we can scale from there and determine the cost of the mailers; the proposal of \$19k includes the cost of design, printing and mailing. We will go with the 20k number until we can narrow it down.

Chairman DeLeonardis said that another option to consider is a smaller number of mailers and the use of Saratoga Today that is a weekly paper that is available to people for seven full days at various locations around the City And online, unlike other papers, mailers or ads placed in papers.

Deputy Sharp said that narrowing down the number of residents to receive mailers is crucial, if it actually 15k, the cost is lowered by \$4k. Commissioner Madigan advised that ideally a mailer must hit three times with one arriving right before Election Day. People do not pay much attention; they often go directly from the mail box to their recycling bin. We must get the message across with something that draws attention.

Discussion on the budget revealed that the total budget was \$40k and \$7,500 was used for the August poll, the contract for legal counsel was for up to \$15k and we are at or near that amount now. To date, including Clerk costs, there is \$14k remaining, and the proposal is just shy of \$19K and that number will most likely be reduced when the number of mailers is clarified.

Chairman DeLeonardis said that three quotes are necessary. Commissioner Scirocco was having difficulty pulling up the proposal from the Black Dog Press

Commissioner Martin agrees with Commissioner Madigan that three is a magical number and the proposed dates of 10/5, 10/17 and 10/31 are good. The mailers should be kept as simple as possible to ensure that the material we send is actually read. Commissioner Madigan said that Deborah Miles Czech is good; we will get a jpeg that we can share on social media. She suggested leaving the final discussions with "Miles Ahead Communications" to the three Commission Officers.

Deputy Sharp said that the Black Dog proposal is about \$9k per mailing, higher than the \$6k from Miles Ahead. Chairman DeLeonardis said that the numbers can most likely be substantially reduced by narrowing

the amount of mail recipients to only City residents; the proposal based the costs on the 12866 zip-code or by mail carriers which include Wilton and parts of Stillwater.

Commissioner Madigan recommended that at least one full page ad be purchased from Saratoga Today which will allow us to include more detail. Chairman DeLeonardis summarized the print media plan as three brief, simple 6" x 11" mailers, joined with a more in-depth half or full page ad in Saratoga Today that will run seven days. Commissioner Madigan suggested having extra flyers printed that we can bring with us to the education forums. Richard Sellers commented from the audience that an 8 x 11 ad in Saratoga Today cost close to \$1,000 and that is less than the Saratogian charges.

Commissioner Madigan said that we could do a Reader's View concurrent with the ad. Chairman DeLeonardis said we could do multiple Reader's Views. He said regarding outreach, he is happy to reach out to anyone, any organization. He asked if the Commission members are comfortable using "Miles Ahead Communication" based on their proposal, and they agreed. The Commission members also agreed that Chairman DeLeonardis, Vice-chairman Sharp and Secretary Daley meet with Miles Ahead Communications to narrow down the details.

Deputy Daley asked about a "union bug" on the mailers. Commissioner Madigan said she does not want to open up political issues; the "bug" is often used in the political realm. Commissioner Martin commented that this is a committee formed by the City. Commissioner Scirocco said the Commission is supposed to be apolitical so it does not make sense to put the "union bug" on the mailers. Deputy Shields questioned the significance of using the bug because it seems to be an endorsement. Commissioner Scirocco agreed, if you have one, it appears to be a union endorsement. Commissioner Madigan is not sure if we should include a "union bug". Commissioner Martin explained that the "union bug" simply shows that Union labor made the document; since the majority of the City's employee rank and file are union members, it would be disrespectful not to use it; if the mailer does not have a "union bug", the assumption is that it was not made by union labor. Deputy Daley said that campaign mailers use "union bugs". Commissioner Scirocco asked if that signifies advocating unions; he has no issue with unions but leaving it out shows that we want to keep the process open and neutral. This proposal might not be endorsed by the unions; he has no problem with the "union bug" indicating that the document was created by union labor, but he does not want its use misinterpreted. Chairman DeLeonardis suggested that we should investigate this further. Commissioner Madigan said we should find out what it means and if it costs more to include it.

Deputy Sharp said he is waiting for the third quote from REM, he will talk directly with them. Chairman DeLeonardis stated that the consensus of the outreach is that we will reach out to Saratoga Today, and if an 8" x 11" ad is feasible, we will work on the content. We are close to our budgeted amount, we might want to consider going to the City Council for a small transfer. Commissioner Madigan stated there would still not be enough money to mail out two separate charters.

Deputy Sharp suggested that as we go through the outreach and education process, based on the questions people ask the most, we will be able to create a "Frequently Asked Questions" list and place it on our website.

Commissioner Martin commented that he understands and applauds the Senior Center's effort to stay out of politics. The point needs to get across that this is an educational endeavor and although it is across party lines, that does not make it political. Commissioner Madigan said people are coming from two places.

Commissioner Martin said that the Saratoga Y has a table; he will look into whether they would agree to let us leave a binder or information there. Deputy Sharp added that coffee shops should be considered as a

place to leave information. Commissioner Madigan said that the Commission has to realize that it was very political last time and although this time is different, the image is still there with people despite our efforts to the contrary. All the people have to hear is "Charter" and their minds go back to last year because the whole thing got too political.

Chairman DeLeonardis said the League of Women Voters is an apolitical group that was criticized for taking a position on the last charter. Commissioner Martin said he will reach out to them; they could hold an informational meeting, but they would have to hold it at the school or at the Library because they do not have a place of their own.

Commissioner Madigan wants Miles Ahead to go into the design phase soon. There is a political aspect to this regardless, but she wants it to be as politically neutral as possible. Deputy Daley advised that cost matters, it is taxpayer money.

It was suggested to approach the Saratoga Springs Board of Education (SSBOE) for a larger outreach beyond the City of Saratoga Springs. Commissioner Martin responded that it is not appropriate to appear before a school board on the topic of our proposed charters; the SSBOE strives to keep itself separate from the machinations and ongoing issues in the communities that the school serves. At this time, the hot topic in front of the SSBOE is whether ten retired Police Officers should be allowed to carry guns on school grounds, and he does not want us to get involved in that.

Deputy Sharp alerted the Commission that with the proposed dates for the mailers of 10/5, 10/17 and 10/31, the process must start by September 17. Secretary Daley, Chairman DeLeonardis and Vice-Chairman Sharp agreed to move the process forward using the bones of the presentation from Chairman DeLeonardis. Commissioner Madigan said that if we have to pre-pay for printing, it might be advisable to get it on the next warrant time-wise because they need a check in hand for the printing and design of each mailing. Chairman DeLeonardis said that if we shoot for October 2, there will be time for the second and third mailers, if we have to adjust budget.

Public Comment

Chairman DeLeonardis opened the second public comment period.

Richard Sellers, Fifth Avenue, Saratoga Springs, NY. He asked if the seven-member Council could be added to the current Charter even if the proposals go down. Chairman DeLeonardis responded that if question one does not pass, the vote on the second question is not relevant.

Bonnie Sellers, Fifth Avenue, Saratoga Springs asked for clarification that if the first question does pass, but the second question does not pass, the charter would be amended but with a five-member Council. Chairman DeLeonardis said that is correct; the second question is worded as further amended.

Bonnie Sellers highly recommends a lot of TV interviews as a group effort and she believes that Reader's Views are good for substance.

Richard Sellers said he would suggest that the ad in Saratoga Today be a 6" x 10" ad because less content is important. Chairman DeLeonardis explained that the idea is to compliment the mailers with a more detailed analysis. Bonnie Sellers said that there are lots of ads in Saratoga Today; she suggests being cautious about where the ad is placed, outside versus inside, top versus bottom, it can be very expensive.

Chairman DeLeonardis explained that this Commission does not have an “It’s Time Saratoga” group for advocacy so the Commission is faced with the challenge to be creative on how they put the word out. He asked Richard Sellers about the meeting with Success group on the 25th. Richard Sellers said that there will be invited members, so he recommends being prepared to discuss the changes, perhaps with a simple chart on what is new and what from the current Charter is being kept, then open it up to questions. Right now, this Commission is being criticized based on the assumption that the form of government is being changed. Bonnie Sellers suggested mentioning the teamwork, the knowledge of department needs, and stress the efficiencies for improved service to the communities. She is proud of this Commission, and she cannot thank this group enough for their sense of professionalism. Richard Sellers agreed that this has been a great example of team work.

Seeing that no one else wished to speak, Chairman DeLeonardis closed the public comment period.

Adjournment

There being no further business or discussion, Chairman DeLeonardis adjourned the meeting at 4:20 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 26 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Wagner
Clerk