

**City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island**  
**Charter Review Commission**  
**City Hall – 169 Main Street**  
**Woonsocket, RI 02895**

**March 13, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

**I. Call to Order**

Chairperson Bono called the meeting to order at 5:40PM

**II. Roll Call**

The following members were present: Chairperson Vincent Bono, Vice-Chairperson David Nabb, Carol Chattman, Thomas Gray, and David Lahousse. All members are present. Also in attendance were Allan Fung, Esq., and Michael Lepizzera III from the Solicitor's Office

**III. New Business**

- Motion by Thomas Gray to Accept Minutes, Seconded by Carol Chattman. All approved.
- Vice-Chairperson David Nabb has condensed the previous charter review recommendations. Chairperson stated that they will address the previous recommendations as they come up in charter review.

Recommended Changes Affecting Whole Charter

There was a discussion concerning gender neutrality:

- Carol Chattman recommended a gender-neutral language in regard to section 12 under Chapter 1 – Wants to change it to say “They” as it is gender neutral.
- Attorney Fung noted that a simpler way to solve the issue was to have one general catchall provision/question upon which the voters can decide that addresses every instance in the charter instead of separate gender or plurality language in each provision very time it comes up. Attorney Fung gave his proposed change language and Carol Chattman said that it seemed to cover her issue.
- David Lahousse said he would rather see each individual change happen, instead of one general catchall that attorney Fung recommended.

- Thomas Gray said that if the language operates and has the same effect the way attorney Fung described, then he would be fine with that
- Vice-chairperson Nabb said that Section 12 should be eliminated, as the Racism Policies Board had recommended
- The Chairperson asked attorney Fung to draft some language for their review and they will discuss next time

Next, there was a discussion about electronic filing of document, minutes, ordinances on the city website:

- Carol Chattman made a recommendation that on Chapter 3 Section 13, all documents i.e. charter and ordinances should be electronically added to the website. All members agreed with that concept.

The members then discussed the need to remove Providence Plantations after State of Rhode Island:

- Vice-chairperson Nabb asked a question about if they need to vote on removing Providence Plantations from the Charter. Attorney Fung said in theory they should vote on it as a technical cleanup to the charter.

There was a general discussion about where public comment should fall on the agenda for this and future meetings:

- David Nabb made motion to take public comment out of order, Seconded by David Lahousse. All voted in favor.

Public Comments:

- Michelle Staber - recommended for the public comments in future meetings to come after the discussion so that she could come up with questions. She also questioned whether something had to be voted on by the voters if it was already state law.
- William Dole - was a member of the charter commission back in the 70s. He was opposed to touching the gender language in section 1. He said it was put in during his time on the charter review commission. He also recommended and agreed that an electronic section should be added.
- Councilperson Brian Thompson – He noted his concern with Chapter 3 Section 7, the 10 day provision for ordinances and noted a conflict with appropriations ordinances which can be considered at one meeting. He also wanted all directors to be sworn officers of the city. He addressed term limits for the mayor and council members. He will be submitting his recommendations to the commission in follow up.

## Specific Chapter and Provisions Discussion

### Chapter 1

- David Nabb had a question as to Section 11 and believes 10 years is too long to wait to have another charter review commission.
- David Lahousse agreed that this time frame is too long.
- Thomas Gray also agreed that they should review the charter more periodically. He also pointed out how the City Council can recommend changes at any time. He wanted to possibly do it sooner than 10 years, possibly in 5 years.
- Vincent Bono believed that a commission should begin with every mayoral term.

### Chapter 2

- David Lahousse asked if we had to clean up the payment for section 4. Attorney Fung noted that the provision just sets the minimum amount. (\$750.00 is the current minimum)
- David Nabb mentioned term limits for the city council and noted he supported term limits for city council.
- David Nabb also brought up section 5 vacancies and suggested striking the days requirement made sense. He said it should be just in accordance with RIGL on election laws.
- Vincent Bono thinks that it makes sense for the city to have a ward system and term limits. He suggested three consecutive terms and a person can run again aft they have sat out a cycle. He also suggested a change to the vacancies language. He noted that if a vacancy occurred during the last 6 months, then there shouldn't be an election. If before the last 6 months, then special election should be in accordance with RIGL
- Attorney Fung noted that that there are various ways that you can fill a vacancy on the council. Vincent Bono asked attorney Fung to draft some language to suggest changes to the vacancies section. He will examine similar language in the Warwick, Providence, and Cranston charters.
- Attorney Fung recommended changing section 12 to say in accordance with RI Open Meetings Act instead of the current language. He also recommended that section 17, the Council should have the ability to have their own attorney. Vincent Bono thought it should be under the clerks section, but attorney Fung suggested that they should put it in the Council section.

### Chapter 3

- David Nabb brought up the language that Councilperson Thompson mentioned. Councilperson Thompson again mentioned that appropriations at the state house level only have 48 hours' notice in accordance with state law. Attorney Fung said that the easiest fix to this would be to delete section (7) in its entirety. David Nabb brought up a technical question, if section (7) is deleted do all the numbers need to change. Attorney Fung said it could be deleted and add language that the section be reserved.
- Vincent brought up 12 and 13 being changed in accordance with the previous recommendations made earlier about electronic updating.

#### Chapter 4

- David Nabb had a concern about the Mayor term and said 2-year terms are too short for attracting talent in director positions. He also said that it is a disruption, as far as getting big projects in the city done. David said that it should be a 4-year term with term limits of 3 consecutive terms. He also suggested changing the language for vacancies provisions for the Mayor. He wanted the salary to just say set by ordinance instead of naming a minimum in the charter.
- Vincent Bono also suggested that a 4-year term is a good idea. He favored two consecutive terms for term limits, allowing for the Mayor to come back if the public wants it so. Vincent Bono also favored the idea of changing the vacancies section.
- Vincent Bono had a question on section 18 as he didn't like that the Mayor has the power to combine or abolish a department. Attorney Fung noted that this is an inherent budgetary power reserved for the Mayor and doesn't necessarily conflict with other charter provisions.

#### Chapter 5

- Carol Chattman had a question about who appoints for these positions. Attorney Fung will research this.
- David Nabb had a question about a previous recommendation of a previous Charter Review Commission about the submission of a fiscal impact statement. Attorney Fung noted that fiscal impact statements for collective bargaining agreements are already required by ordinance and also state law.
- Vincent Bono brought up section 6 and wanting monthly reports to be generated and sent to the council and the mayor. Councilperson Thompson chimed in and stated that they already currently get them.
- Thomas Gray asked Councilperson Thompson if he thinks that they needed to change the language in section 6. Councilperson Thompson said that we might be looking at 16 or 17 provisions that need to go before the council and for him, this change was not as concerning as others that he would recommend.
- Attorney Fung recommended that the language "consistent with state law" be added. He said that this would satisfy any technical violations. Vincent Bono said that they might want to change it to say, "by ordinance and by state law".
- Public Comment by William Dole - they should add a section about an enterprise department as he was concerned about hiring of employees independent of the mayor/council. Attorney Fung discussed in general how enterprise funds work within a city budget and how they are basically separate accounting. Thomas Gray asked if it is under a specific section. Councilperson Thompson said that those finance position that Mr. Dole inquired about was under the public works department and that they did approve of the funds for that hiring. Attorney Fung confirmed that the use of those funds have to go before the Council. The funds are overseen by the Public Works and the Finance Director.
- Attorney Fung also pointed out that Article 2 Section 3, should add language to allow for the hiring of any consultants, such as a fiscal advisor for the treasurer/investment commission.

No Chapter 6 discussion occurred as that was a typo and should be for next week's agenda.

## Charter Review Commission Website

- There was a complaint that Chairperson Bono received in the comments section about the requirement that an ID needed to be uploaded so that people cannot submit items anonymously or in another's name. The members agreed that this was a fair check that would not allow a person to impersonate someone else. Plus, it was noted that public commenters in attendance had to give their name and address before they testify.

## Scheduling for the next couple of meetings

- The council chamber will not be available for the next two weeks as it is previously booked. David Nabb will inquire with an alternate site, particularly the Woonsocket Education Center.

### **IV. Public Comment**

Nothing further

### **V. Adjournment**

Motion by David Nabb to Adjourn, Seconded by Thomas Gray. All voted unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.

/s/ Allan W. Fung

Counsel for the Woonsocket Charter Review Commission