

The meeting of the Dorchester County Charter Review Committee was called to order at 6:32 p.m on Wednesday, June 1. Linda Henry accessed the meeting by phone. All other Committee members were present.

The minutes were unanimously approved as written with a motion by Dr. Stafford and a second by Rev. Ames.

In response to the letters the Committee sent to Department Heads, Mr. Reed reported he has gotten several replies but none were in writing. All the responses were by phone, including some from past Department Heads. They were asked to give both positive and negative reviews and answer what things they would like to see changed or added. The Committee members opted to not know the identity of the callers as they felt it was the review and not the individuals they were interested in.

Some of the main discussions centered around:

1. Ethics (this does not fall under our review) however the Committee felt the current Ethics Code for Dorchester County deals mostly with finance and does not address other ethics concerns. There does not seem to be any way to address violations as they occur, like in the violations the Committee feels are happening now with the County Council. There needs to be a way to add strength to either the Ethics Code or the Charter to give recourse for violations.
2. Charter Petition: Some members of the Committee feel the petition some County residents are putting forth address most everything we are proposing and we should pass the petition on to the County. Others felt that we should use the parts of the petition we feel are good and find a way to put them into the Charter changes we recommend. We can support the petition and still make the changes we feel are necessary, plus address some of the concerns that the petition does not speak to.
3. Council duties: the County Council needs to understand their job. The most important point we keep hearing and the Committee seems to support is that the Council must act as a body and not as individual Council members. How can we maybe word the Charter differently to make that point more succinctly. Mr. Reed will write up some wording and pass it to Dr. Stafford to “finesse”.
4. Lack of leadership: Respondents felt that the line of leadership is broken and because there is no real line of command being followed it creates low morale and uncertainty in both the Department Heads and the Employees.
5. Need to strengthen County Manager position: This addresses the previous point and respondents felt in order for stability and to help take out the politics in the employment, the County Manager must have more control over the day to day operations of the County and the hiring and firing of employees.

The Committee began going line by line over the Charter, trying to see where we can put our ideas in and exactly how we can word the changes. We will be looking over other County charters to see if we can get ideas that may fit what we are trying to do.

Public Comments:

Gene Lauer- Mr. Lauer felt the interviews hit the nail on the head with the employees. He has never seen so much turnover as has been happening here in the County. He also felt he had never seen a County Council involve themselves in the day to day operations as some members of this Council has.

The next meeting will be held on either June 7 or June 15 depending on the availability of the room. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Dukes