

Charter Review Commission Meeting
Regular Session
December 13, 2023

The Charter Review Commission for Dorchester County convened in Open Session in Room 110 of the County Office Building at 6:00 p.m. on the 13th day of December, 2023.

A roll call of the members was conducted. Present in Room 110 were: William Layton, Chair; Linda Henry; Susan Dukes; George “Phillip” Reed; Glenn Bramble; Allen Nelson, and, Robert Murphy. Also present in Room 110 was Donna F. Lane, Chief of Staff.

REGULAR SESSION

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Commission approved the minutes of November 15, 2023 with the following amendment to the item “Proposed Addition-Article 2, Section 206:” changing 2024 to 2026 as the year in which term limits will apply.

DISCUSSION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL-PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO CURRENT COUNTY CHARTER

A discussion ensued regarding proposed term limits. Mr. MacLeod said he viewed the Commission’s document listing its proposed amendments to the current County Charter. He explained that: 1) how term limits are implemented is a legal issue; 2) if there is a consensus to ask Council to pursue term limits the number of terms need to be specified; and, 3) most laws enacted that relate to an elected position, affect the next individuals that are elected, not the sitting Council Members.

Mr. MacLeod provided examples of ballot questions from another county. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Murphy, Mr. MacLeod said the Commission members can provide an explanation/reason for their recommendations. He stated that if the Council agrees to move forward with an amendment he will prepare a Resolution for its consideration and then a ballot question.

A motion to rescind and revise the term limit recommendation of three years to four years was seconded; however, no final vote was taken. Mr. MacLeod said if Council agrees to move forward with a term limit recommendation from the Commission, it will be placed on the 2024 ballot which is halfway through the current sitting Council Members’ term.

Pursuant to a query from Mr. Nelson, Mr. MacLeod said a report can be provided to the voters prior to placement of an item on the ballot; however, the proposed Charter amendment will be condensed to a simple statement beforehand. He advised that no later than the 95th day before the General Election, which is in early August 2024, the County Attorney must certify the ballot questions upon Council’s approval by Resolution. Ms. Dukes stressed the need to educate the public on any proposed amendments the Council agrees to pursue, which was recommended by the Committee.

Mr. MacLeod expressed his understanding that charters of other counties do not contain much detail, noting that a statement to ensure transparency is sufficient. Mr. Nelson stated that the detailed information regarding transparency can be provided to the Council as the rationale for the proposed Charter amendment. Mr. MacLeod advised that it is his expectation that: 1) the County will hold a public hearing at which the Commission will present its recommendations; 2) the Council will take the recommendations under advisement; and, 3) the Council will discuss the proposed amendments in meeting(s) at the later date. He cited his belief that it is unlikely the proposed language about the County Manager be added to the County Charter. He noted that some of the items were discussed by the prior County Council.

Mr. Murphy noted that the Commission Members agreed to ask the Council to amend the residency requirements for the Finance Director and the County Manager and to give the County Manager more authority. Ms. Dukes emphasized that the reason for the chain of command is that the Council needs to act as a Board. A brief discussion ensued regarding an action taken by the Wicomico County elected Executive in response to actions taken by the Wicomico County Council.

Ms. Henry noted that changes the Commission wishes the Council to consider in Article 4 are highlighted for readability. Mr. MacLeod said this language can be provided to the Council as a way they can implement the changes. A discussion ensued regarding the Charter Review Commission presenting its recommended Charter amendments at the Council's second meeting in January 2024. Mr. MacLeod said the Council should receive the recommendations in advance of any placement on an agenda for its review and consideration. The Commission recognized that Mr. Layton will prepare proposed language at the next meeting. Mr. Nelson noted that the language in Section 405 or 406 was approved by an attorney at the request of the Dorchester Citizens for Better Government.

Based on an inquiry from Mr. MacLeod, Ms. Dukes said the County Charter has not been amended since its adoption in 2002.

MEETING SCHEDULE DISCUSSION

Mr. Lane advised that: 1) currently the CAC meets the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.; and, 2) if the decision is to continue to follow this schedule the dates for meetings from January 2024 to June 2024 are as follows: January 3rd, January 17th, February 7th, February 21st, March 6th, March 20th, April 3rd, April 17th, May 1st, May 15th, June 5th and June 19th. The Commission agreed to schedule meetings for January 3, 2024 and January 17, 2024.


ADJOURNMENT

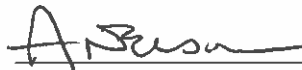
With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned.

ATTEST:


Donna F. Lane, Chief of Staff/Liaison

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION


William Layton, Chair



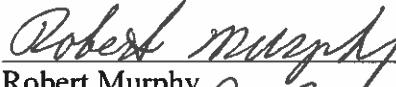
Allen Nelson, Vice Chair



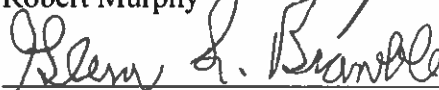
George "Phillip" Reed



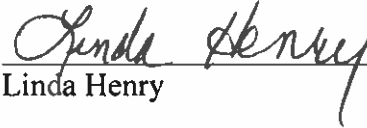
Susan Dukes



Robert Murphy



Glenn Bramble



Linda Henry

Approved the 3rd day of January 2024