

ALTOONA GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2014 – 6:00 P.M.  
CITY OF ALTOONA TRAINING FACILITY & COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
1320 WASHINGTON AVENUE, ALTOONA, PA

CALL TO ORDER at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Hippo

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL was taken by City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer; present were Study Commission Members: Dave Duncan, Heather Eckels, Richard Flarend, Bev Green, Robert Kutz, Vice-Chairman Richard Fiore Jr. and Chairman Wayne Hippo

ALL PUBLIC COMMENT – former Mayor William Schirf thanked the Commission for their time and effort and for looking at the full time Mayor position and proposed Home Rule Charter; Mr. Schirf stated the City ended 2013 with a balanced budget and a small surplus which is going to be a continued projection for the next three years; the Act 47 Recovery Plan needs the support of the Government Study Commission; Mr. Schirf stated his last paycheck with the City was \$17.99; Mr. Schirf stated if the Mayor's position is going to be full time in the future, the salary needs to reflect that; Scranton paid their Mayor \$50,000 and raised it to \$60,000 in 2014 with a plan to raise it \$5,000 per year over the next three years; Mr. Schirf stated Senate Bill 1157 will address a cap of the number of years a municipality can stay in Act 47 thus the importance of this Home Rule Charter; although some taxes are uncapped some fees will be capped that were not previously and the Council is there to keep a check and balance on the system; one the exit strategies of the Act 47 Plan is the adoption of a Home Rule Charter by the City of Altoona which will bring a fresh start and a renewal; Mr. Schirf stated he believes people want to see change and they are in favor of a full time Mayor for the City of Altoona

ADOPTION OF THE MARCH 17, 2014 MEETING MINUTES - Upon motion of Bob Kutz seconded by Beverly Green all were in favor to adopt the March 17, 2014 meeting minutes and the motion carried; all were present for the vote

OUTLINE – REVIEW OF CHARTER DRAFT 2, MAYOR AND COUNCIL SALARIES, FARRELL'S SECTIONS ON NAMES AND BOUNDARIES, POWERS OF THE CITY, ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Solicitor Larry Clapper provided the Commission with a second draft of the Charter

Dave Duncan asked if there are standard phrases or paragraphs that are required to be in Charters; Larry Clapper stated no; the language has to include election by districts and the number on the municipal council and all offices to be filled by election and whether election shall be at large, by district or combination district and at large basis; setting up a government is usually done by looking at other governments

Dave Duncan stated he asked because the further the Commission goes the more inclined he is to say as little as possible on the Charter under the assumption that

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effective leadership is going to be providing for the City; Mr. Duncan stated his preference is to not constrain future leadership

Mr. Fiore stated there will be an opportunity to go back through and remove things from the proposed Charter that do not work before it becomes a final draft

Chairman Hippo stated he believes the proposed Charter is 70% done and he is pleased with where the Commission is on the timeline; Chairman Hippo mentioned the Commission needs to schedule another Public Hearing in order to maximize input and public participation on this

Vice-Chairman Fiore stated there are two major sections left, Finance and City Controller and additional testimony is needed once fact finding is complete; Mr. Fiore believes it will take three to four more meetings to finish the Charter and then a full draft to publish on the City's website and a Public Hearing; there also needs to be a written final report which is a summary of everything

The Commission agreed to cancel the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, hold the May 5, May 19 and June 2 meetings, cancel June 16, add June 9 as a Public Hearing at Penn State Devorris Downtown Center and meet with Council prior at their Strategic Planning Meeting on June 9, add June 23, add July 7 and July 21; the Commission agreed to receive testimony from City Finance Director Omar Strohm, City Controller AC Stickel and the Mayor of Easton

The Commission's May 5th agenda would include general provisions, transition committee, initiatives and referendums, May 19 would include testimony; the deadline date for ballot referendum is September 5

The Commission would like a draft on the City website by June 6, incorporate any public comments on July 7, prepare final report on July 21; the final meetings will be to prepare and file the report and prepare the referendum

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL SALARIES** – Chairman Hippo complimented the City Clerk on the salary chart that was prepared and how obvious it is by this document of where the salaries need to be

Chairman Hippo asked the Commission to consider not including the salary information in the Charter; Chairman Hippo stated the Commission is to be giving the footprint of the government; the Transition Committee can recommend or Council can set the salary; historically when the salary has been included in the Charter it had to be changed repeatedly

Vice-Chairman Fiore stated if the numbers were initially in the Charters they were very wrong and had to be changed substantially; typically the Home Rule Study Commissions did not do a good job of setting a starting point; there was a tendency to make the

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salaries too low; Vice Chairman Fiore stated he is not comfortable in setting a salary on behalf of City Council and thinks it should be left up to the Transition Committee; Vice Chairman Fiore would like to address the benefits package for the Mayor with medical benefits and a basic package with no long term pension burden

Mr. Flarend liked Lebanon's benefit package; Lebanon states a \$5000 contribution to the Mayor's IRA; Mr. Flarend believes this information should be upfront

Mr. Fiore believes the Charter should identify the Mayor should be eligible for a benefit package but no pension is available and also identify that only reasonable costs will be reimbursed for Council with no benefits package or pension

Mr. Duncan suggested that language read the City has a full time Mayor that will be compensated equitably and fairly; the leaders in the future will make the decisions and Mr. Duncan is disinclined to restrain them with things the current leaders of 2014 think are good; this would be short-sided and considered micro managing

Chairman Hippo stated he wants a Charter document that will stand the test of time and does not need to be amended constantly; through the recommendation of the Transition Committee Council can adopt salary and benefits by ordinance and modify it by ordinance and not modify the Charter

Mr. Flarend stated benefits should not be in the Charter but a starting point for the salary should be in the Charter and Council should have the opportunity to change it up or down if necessary

Vice Chairman Fiore stated what Larry Clapper wrote should remain; Mr. Duncan stated there is too much said and it is too complex; Vice Chairman Fiore is opposed to City Council providing a pension for a Mayor position but if the Commission is trusting Mayor and Council will not do that anyhow then it probably can be removed from the Charter

Chairman Hippo stated he wants to see term limits in the Charter

The Commission decided against specifying a baseline salary in the Charter; those in favor of this included Mr. Duncan, Ms. Green, Mr. Hippo and Mr. Fiore; Mr. Flarend, Ms. Eckels, and Mr. Kutz want to see a number in the Charter

The Commission decided to not set the pension and benefits package in the Charter since they were going to remain silent on the salary

The Commission decided to not set Council salary in the Charter

The Commission discussed term limits; Chairman Hippo stated in all levels of government sometimes people stay around for too long and he would be comfortable with setting a term limit of 12 years combined; Mr. Flarend stated the two were

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unrelated; Mr. Clapper stated there was nothing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Class City Code; Mr. Kutz stated he has often heard term limits are best described by the voters; Mr. Flarend stated at the local level there may be someone who does the job really well; Mr. Fiore stated Council is more a service to the City but Mayor should have term limits; the Commission was in favor of 3 four year term limits for the Mayor and no term limits for City Council; there will be an opportunity for the public and Council to comment on June 9<sup>th</sup> at the Public Hearing; Larry Clapper stated the Optional Plans Law addresses the election of a Mayor; the Commission asked Larry Clapper to review the process of election; Mr. Flarend and Mr. Fiore questioned what if the Mayor dies or is arrested while in office; Attorney Clapper and Attorney Hippo believe it may be addressed in the election law

The Commission reviewed Name and will use Farrell language

The Commission reviewed Boundaries and will use Farrell language

The Commission reviewed Effective Date; Larry Clapper stated this is important because of the transition; the date the Charter will become effective is 2015 with the elected and appointed offices happening in January 2016; Larry Clapper stated the Mayor will become the council person and be paid as the Mayor and cannot receive a reduction in salary; Larry Clapper will review this

Article II - Powers of the City-Larry Clapper suggested this language remain; the Commission will use Farrell's language

Ordinances and Resolutions – (Farrell language) items 1,2,3 are good; delete except for fines language; 5, 6, 7 and 8 are good; delete or lease; delete 10; 11 is good; change numbers

General Ordinance Requirements – Larry Clapper will suggest and provide at the next meeting

At the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting the Commission will finish ordinances and resolutions, move onto general provisions, transition and continuation, initiative and referendum, contracts

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENT – none

MEDIA QUESTIONS - Media present included Bill Kibler, *Altoona Mirror*, Steve Willett, WRTA

ADJOURNMENT - by Chairman Hippo at 8:00 p.m.

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Linda Rickens Schellhammer, City Clerk/Recording Secretary