

ALTOONA GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, MAY 19, 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, Robert Kutz, and Chairman Wayne Hippo; those absent included Bev Green and Vice-Chairman Richard Fiore Jr.

ALL PUBLIC COMMENT – offered by Chairman Hippo and none given

ADOPTION OF THE MAY 5, 2014 MEETING MINUTES - Upon motion of Bob Kutz seconded by Dave Duncan all were in favor to adopt the May 5, 2014 meeting minutes and the motion carried; Bev Green and Vice-Chairman Richard Fiore Jr. were absent

INTERVIEW – Mayor Sal Panto, City of Easton

Mayor Panto stated when he first served as Mayor from 1984 to 1992 under a Strong Mayor/Council plan Cities of the 3rd Class the problems were the structure had an elected Treasurer which the City of Altoona got rid of in the change in 1987; Mayor Panto stated now he believes the only way for Altoona to progress and to deal with the challenges cities face on a daily basis is to go home rule because “we are children of the state” and even with ome rule charters you still are not allowed to do too many things or make too many changes but there is more flexibility; in 2006 Easton was entering into the early intervention program of Act 47 and Council created a Charter Commission for which Mayor Panto was a member of; they had nine members who served for a 1 ½ years of deliberations and interviews and they also hired a consultant to guide them through the process and a charter; the strengths of a Home Rule Charter are the professionalism brought to City Hall, the flexibility brought to managing the government, the removal of a City Treasurer; today Easton is not on the verge of Act 47 and is not 4 ½ million dollars in debt; Easton’s fund balance is up to 5 million dollars, healthcare insurance and casualty insurance are building and getting stronger; Mayor Panto believes it is because the Charter gave them flexibility to make changes; Mayor Panto professes the Strong Mayor form of government and believes what is underneath in the administration is up to the Commission; Mayor Panto believes City Managers are good but they do not have the political face that the Mayor has; the title of City Councilman doesn’t hold the weight that Mayor does; Mayor Panto believes every community needs a political face; a full time Mayor can pound the halls of DCED or DCNR, etc; Easton has been able to get 60 million dollars in grant money over the last seven years because the Mayor is in Washington and Harrisburg and constantly calling and making sure he is out

there; they have received new soccer and lacrosse fields in their parks with a grant and 4 million dollars toward a new gateway; Easton took over center square from PennDOT and received \$600,000 for updates and also restored an old silk mill for 75 million dollars which involved street improvements; the government that they use works although the largest debate was regarding strong mayor and city manager; what they came up with was Easton has a full time Mayor who serves as the President of Council who has a vote but no veto which would be way too much power; Mayor Panto has always approached everything as a team and no one person can change a City; Easton has a City Administrator as opposed to a City Manager who reports to the Mayor with everything this person does needing the approval of the Mayor; the Directors answer to the City Administrator and the hiring and firing and daily routine administrative tasks are done by the City Administrator with the approval of the Mayor; Mayor Panto stated this has not led to any tension and works well if you can get the right person; Mayor Panto believes the foundation put down over the last seven years was because of the Home Rule Charter as finances are much better and economic development is improving with major projects and they are on their way to say Act 47 is not going to be in their future; Easton went from a BBB bond rating to an A+ in 2012; Mayor Pantos thinks the City Administrator should be a Managing Director and should be hired and fired by the Mayor, should not be a member of Council and Council should be able to act on its own and that each Councilmember should serve as a Committee Chair of a department; Mayor Panto stated a part time Mayor cannot give up two days to do some of the things that lobbying in Harrisburg and DC requires; Mayor Panto mentioned the City of Orlando as a model of a Strong Mayor on Council; Easton also has an Economic Development Director, Planning Director, Personnel Director, Finance Director, Police Chief, Fire Chief and the Directors now go through the City Administrator; Mayor Panto does not like to see employees who are not city residents as they may be too far away to get to work in bad weather; Mayor Panto stated city employees are on call 24/7 and they may not all be public servants but they do serve the public; Mayor Panto believes there should be a certain skill set for every job as technology is changing; Easton now takes credit cards and receivables are going down; Mayor Panto stated they run their City like it is a business and they are compassionate with people but they will turn off water for the continuously delinquent customers, especially absentee landlords; Mayor Panto stated the skill set for the Office of Mayor needs to be a common sense people person with a willingness and who knows that you cannot tax yourself out of situations, this person must understand municipal budgets and budgets in general and is willing to look at the numbers; all one shots are taken out of the budget and leased instead of purchased with a bond; Mayor Panto stated there is a salary commission that meets every three years to evaluate the position of Mayor and determines what the position deserves as pay; Mayor Panto stated he goes through an evaluation internally with the department directors and he evaluates the team and they evaluate him; Mayor Panto stated he supports the unions and is a union guy but believes the unions needs to reciprocate and support the City as well; Mayor Panto stated he initially had a rough go with the Fire

Department but now things are great and they are doing phenomenal things and Fire themselves are proud of what they are doing; the Police Department and AFSCME employees do a great job and are now held in high regard by the public; Mayor Panto stated the approach is a smile and to remember that 99% of the people they meet throughout the day are good people that made a mistake; the example Mayor Panto gave was if the Police Department has to pull over an elderly resident for going through the red light because she didn't see it the police officer that removes the sunglasses and gloves and approaches the situation with concern for the person's safety will notice a different attitude by the elderly resident and other city residents; Mayor Panto stated he has a good working relationship with all of the unions and education is important; Mayor Panto stated Easton also has a City Controller for checks and balances; Mayor Panto stated they have a good coalition with Lafayette College and they sponsor a lot of things the City can't pay for; Easton does not have an industrial area to redevelop so they are working on their downtown and their neighborhoods; Mayor Panto stated they have a neighborhood program called City Directed Rehabilitation where they take blighted properties and change from apartments into homes usually bought by the City at sheriff sale or for unpaid taxes and the fees are waived to get the building; they then put people to work fixing up the properties and they are sold to families only that have to live there with a rule of not being allowed to reconvert to apartments again right on the deed and meet 80% of mean income; Mayor Panto stated most of the development taking place is in downtown as their downtown does not have retail any longer; their downtown is based on the arts, entertainment and tourism and they still have the Crayola Factory which recently received an \$800,000 investment; there are young people and young professionals now moving into apartments in downtown on the upper floors of buildings that have been vacant for many years; they are being rehabbed by private developers with a market rent rate of \$1,000 to \$1,200 per month; the percentage of homeownership is less than 60% which is why the rehab program of taking apartments and turning them into single family home ownership is so important right now; the drug and gang problem was coming from this; Easton has 63 police officers, 28,000 residents, 4 ½ square miles and a budget of 32 million dollars; there is a rental licensing program for absentee landlords who inspect every four years; they are required to have a local manager; the biggest problem is the PA courts which gives all of the landlords all of the rights in the world; Mayor Panto stated these buildings are safety concerns for firefighters and other employees and residents

INTERVIEW – A.C. Stickel, City Controller

Mr. Stickel stated many residents do not know the duties of a Controller which are outlined in the 3rd Class City Code with the single biggest thing being to maintain the daily balances of the City; the Controller receives daily revenues and expenditures reports from the Finance Department; the changes to the Third Class City Code happened in January and are now effective and there are changes to the position although not significant; most Controllers work part time although there are full time Controllers and the salaries range from \$100.00 per month to

\$90,000 annually; the City has a Controller at \$25,000 annually; the department has one full time Deputy Controller; the duties include balance the daily receipts, compile reports and compile reports for storage, final signature on every purchase order and the final signature on every check; Mr. Stickel stated he spent over an hour with the IT consultant regarding an IT audit and a number of things need to be streamlined and done electronically in order to keep up with technology; the Controller reviews accounts payable, signs vouchers, tracks check sequences and receipts, prepares for the external audit by doing a spot audit on different accounts periodically, audits the petty cash accounts, audits the FOP clothing allowance and the school crossing guard clothing fund, prepares letters to the auditors for everybody the City does business with which is approximately 75-100 banks, insurance companies and all that have contracts and do business with the City; track highway aid receipts, track manual receipts, perform departmental checks on all monies received and review transactions; Mr. Stickel stated he re-wrote the purchasing policy soon after he took office in 2002 and trained and educated the departments and it is still followed today; on whether or not to have a controller – Mr. Stickel likes the idea of an elected official autonomous from City Council, the Mayor and the City Manager although Mr. Stickel stated he has had no problems with any mentioned; Mr. Stickel will bring anything extraordinary to someone's attention and does not feel the need to decide what a Director can buy if it's in the budget as Council approved the budget and the budget was prepared by the Manager; Mr. Stickel stated the problem with an elected Controller being responsible only to the voter is there is no specific time required and there could be someone who shows up for ten minutes three times a week and might be able to oversee the Deputy and be fine with that or there may be a Controller who sits in the office in City Hall all day with the door closed and not doing anything; there could also be someone with a different skill set and involved; regardless of whether the Controller is removed the processes still need to be completed and the Deputy could be placed into the Finance Department

REVIEW OF DRAFT 4

City Solicitor Larry Clapper reviewed draft 4 of the Charter to include: effective date, eminent domain, terms of office for the Mayor, filling of vacancies, ordinances and resolutions, general ordinance requirements, ordinance enactment, publication and effective date of ordinances, emergency ordinances, penalties, authentication and recording, contracts to include requirements, competitive bids, bidding procedures, exceptions to competitive bidding, maximum term, adjustments to bid amount, no bids received

At the next meeting the Commission will review Initiative and Referendum, Transition and Continuation and Charter Amendment and will interview Interim City Manager Peter Marshall

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENT – none

Government Study Commission Meeting Minutes 5/19/14

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

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

Linda Rickens Schellhammer, City Clerk/Recording Secretary