



King County

Ron Sims
King County Executive

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

Mark Yango
Charter Review Coordinator

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King County Charter Review Commission
Meeting Minutes – April 24, 2007
Seattle Municipal Tower, 5:30pm-7:30pm

The April 24, 2007 meeting of the King County Charter Review Commission (CRC) was called to order by co-chair Mike Lowry at 5:37 p.m.

Commission members in attendance:

Mike Lowry, Co-chair
Lois North, Co-chair
Juan Bocanegra
Doreen Cato
Jim English
Dan Gandara
Kirsten Haugen
Tara Jo Heinecke
John Jensen
Terry Lavender
Allan Munro
Sarah Rindlaub
Mike Wilkins
James Williams

Absent:

Trisha Ann Bennett
Bryan Glynn
John Groen
Darcy Goodman
Gregg Hirakawa
Gary Long
Sharon Maeda

Staff:

Mark Yango, Charter Review Coordinator
Corrie Watterson Bryant, Project Manager, Charter Review Commission
Charlotte Ohashi, Administrative Assistant, Charter Review Commission

Council and PAO Staff:

Ross Baker, Chief of Staff, King County Council
Rebecha Cusack, Legislative Lead Analyst, King County Council
Grace Reamer, Legislative Aide, District 3, King County Council
Mike Sinsky, Prosecuting Attorney's Office

Guests:

Christel Brunnenkant, King County League of Women Voters
James Burrows
Virginia Gunby
Miriam Helgeland
Robert Hill
Lindsay Nussbaum
Sonny Putter, Suburban Cities Association
Lucy Steers, The Municipal League of King County

1. Opening Remarks and Introductions

Mike Lowry made introductory comments and asked for approval of the minutes from the March 27, 2007 meeting. An amendment was made to change: *Public Outreach, page 4, paragraph 3* to read: "The number of outreach meetings will be decided at the next meeting on April 24, 2007." The minutes were accepted as amended.

2. Guest Speakers

Christel Brunnenkant, Chair of the League of Women Voters (LWV) King County Coordinating Council, described LWV as a non-partisan organization made up of volunteers who believe in good government. LWV supports forms of government that are representative of the areas governed.

LWV presented their initial comments on the charter:

1. The regional committees should be continued and their functions reviewed.
2. CRC recommendations to the County Council should be automatically placed on the next general election ballot.
3. Voters should be given the opportunity to decide whether King County elected positions should be partisan or non-partisan.
4. County positions requiring technical expertise (including the Elections director) should be appointed, while those requiring representation of the people (such as the Council and school boards) should be elected.
5. Campaigns at every level of government should be publicly financed.

A lengthy discussion of Ms. Brunnenkant's comments ensued.

Ms. Brunnenkant answered questions from Allan Munro and John Jensen regarding whether the Assessor and Elections Director should be elected, responding that the LWV believes that technical positions such as these should be appointed. She believes that candidates running for office are not necessarily fully qualified, while there is a better chance that an appointee will be well qualified for their position. She offered the Executive's yearlong search to replace the previous Elections Director as evidence that the county is seeking a highly competent employee.

Ms. Brunnenkant believes the previous Elections Director was technically competent, while noting that the infrastructure of the Elections Department does need work.

Sarah Rindlaub asked why the LWV believes that the public should decide whether elected positions should be partisan. Ms. Brunnenkant responded that the city governments in the county are mostly non-partisan, while the county is partisan, and this difference can create difficulty in the relations between the county and the cities. She offered that the county's main function is to provide basic infrastructure services, which is not a partisan issue. She summarized that partisanship can be an obstacle.

Ms. Brunnenkant responded to a question by Doreen Cato about descriptive titles for ballot initiatives.

Lucy Steers, of The Municipal League of King County (Muni League), presented her organization's charter issues to the CRC. The Muni League believes that:

1. Partisanship issues should be placed on the ballot; a thorough public debate on partisan vs. non-partisan positions is called for. The Muni League agrees with the LWV that policy makers should be elected, and administrators appointed.
2. Most rural areas feel unrepresented and unheard. The perception in rural areas is of a lack of representation and unfairness in county government's policies. Council members are primarily from urban areas, which have separate municipal governments. The League is beginning a study of property rights issues in King County.
3. Amend the Charter to allow future Charter changes to be made by citizen initiative. The LWV feels that the Council's role as gatekeeper of Charter amendments may be too restrictive. One question, if this proposal is considered by the CRC, is whether the required number of signatures should be higher for Charter changes than for other initiatives.
4. The 1997 CRC found that the Regional Committees were not as successful as they could be. The CRC recommended a number of changes, including a deadline for council action on Regional Committee recommendations.
5. The Ethics Board and Ombudsman need to be reviewed to ensure their offices are fulfilling their original intent and mission.

A discussion of the Muni League's comments ensued.

Lois North asked for more details on the Muni League's support for amending the charter by initiative. Ms. Steers responded that the Muni League would consider sponsoring a citizen initiative to sponsor this change. She added that this is a difficult issue for the Council.

Dan Gandara wondered if electing (rather than appointing) public officials assures their independence, as is often claimed. Ms. Steers replied that there is still a measure of accountability for appointed officials, because if citizens are unhappy with their performance, the public will make life hard for their elected bosses.

Juan Bocanegra asked if the League had ever studied the impact of gentrification on King County. Ms. Steers said they had not, but she thought it was a great idea for future study. James Williams wondered if the Muni League had investigated public financing for campaigns. Ms.

Steers answered that they had taken a position on it, largely because the state, not the county, has control over those regulations. Initiative 134 of 1993 prohibited local governments from having public financing programs. She noted that public financing did work well prior to its prohibition.

Terry Lavender asked Ms. Steers about the CRC's public outreach meetings. She recommended that the CRC conduct hearings in small cities and in the rural areas of the county. She also advised commissioners to review the final report of the 1997 CRC.

Responding to a comment from Jim English about representation in unincorporated areas of the county, Ms. Steers noted that Mary Margaret Haugen, in 1995, proposed a package of unincorporated areas legislation to address many of these issues. The Muni League would like to resurrect this package of legislation.

3. Outreach Efforts

Mark Yango reviewed outreach efforts to date. Letters requesting participation in the charter review process were sent to 360 organizations, representing a wide spectrum of King County groups. Organizations were asked to respond by mid-May. Letters were also sent to the Council, asking how members would like to engage with the CRC.

Mr. Yango asked commissioners if they were open to inviting representatives from a number of groups to speak at the next meetings. Possibilities are the Suburban Cities Association (SCA), the Unincorporated Area Councils (UACs), and King County elected officials. The Assessor and Sheriff have already expressed interest in speaking.

The CRC agreed to invite elected officials to the May or June meetings. Jim English volunteered to contact the UACs to see which groups and representatives would be able to attend a future meeting. The SCA will also be invited to present at an upcoming meeting; SCA representative Sonny Putter will contact CRC staff with the SCA's availability.

The City of Seattle and the City of Bellevue were also mentioned as possible future speakers.

Commissioners suggested a number of other groups to contact for their feedback on the charter, including the Committee to End Homelessness, the NW Defenders Association, the Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons, the Seattle NW Health Institute, the Housing Authorities, Childhaven, the Columbia Legal Association, and the Evergreen Association.

4. Public Hearings

Mr. Yango presented three options for public outreach meetings, including 1) four or five public meetings around the county, 2) nine public meetings, one in each district, or 3) five hearings in the areas with most response to our outreach letter.

Mr. Jensen encouraged the CRC to invite locals groups to speak at the hearings.

With regard to the UACs, Ms. Lavender suggested that in addition to inviting them to attend our hearings, commissioners could attend the regular meetings of the UACs.

Ms. Cato raised the question of how to advertise for the meetings, and encourage citizens to attend. She noted that we should do our best to draw a diverse crowd. Mr. Yango reviewed the

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media efforts that will be made, including email blasts, the CRC's website, flyers, stories in major media outlets. Another commissioner noted that it is important to be inclusive of the rural areas.

In response to concerns over the amount of time needed by CRC staff to organize nine meetings, Ross Baker suggested that Council staff could assist the CRC staff with the meetings.

Commissioners discussed the number of needed meetings at length, and came to a consensus that nine meetings would more fully represent the county's citizens, while not stretching staff resources too thin (particularly if help is received from other Executive and Council staff).

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Lavender to have nine public meetings to represent the nine council districts.

Seconded by Mr. Bocanegra.

Amended by Mr. Lowry, to include that commissioners' attendance can be according to their individual schedules. Commissioners do not need to attend all meetings.

The motion was passed unanimously as amended.

CRC and Council staff were directed to immediately begin planning the nine meetings. Mr. Yango noted that the proposed calendar for hearings might go into August.

A commissioner asked if there a "game plan" for the meetings, in terms of what is to be accomplished and the format of the meeting. Mr. Yango explained that each meeting would feature introductions, a short presentation about the charter by CRC staff, and an extended comment period for citizens (including time limits for each speaker). A commissioner suggested that the issue sheets handed out by LWV and Muni League could be used as a basis to begin discussion of the issues.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 29, 2007

Mr. Lowry adjourned the meeting at 7:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Charlotte Ohashi and Corrie Watterson