



ST. GEORGE CHARTER COMMISSION MEETING 6

MEETING MINUTES

WELCOME & ROLL CALL

Councilman Ryan Heck, Commission Chairman, called the meeting of the St. George City Charter Commission to order at 5:33 p.m. on Wednesday, October 16, 2024.

John Snow initiated a roll call and attendance was recorded. Chairman Ryan Heck, Vice Chair Patty Cook, Norman Browning, Josh Hoffpauir, Erin Monroe, Andrew Murrell, Rubin Patel, Kimberly Plant, and Gerry Tarleton were present and voting members of the commission, with Chris Meyer and Jason DeCuir absent.

Chairman Heck called for and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MEETING 5 MINUTES

Heck moved to approve the minutes. Tarleton seconded the motion. With no opposition, the minutes were approved.

REVIEW DRAFT CHARTER

Heck addressed the commission and members of the public present to open the meeting. Heck thanked the commission members for their time and effort throughout the charter development process. He continued by noting the uniqueness of the charter development process and acknowledging the progress the group has made together.

Cook followed Heck's introduction and also thanked the commission members for their time in the charter process. She continued by reminding the commission that disagreement is good and sharing her hope that the commission developed a charter that will be effective for St. George.

John Snow introduced the latest draft charter and opened the discussion for the evening. Snow explained the commission will go section by section through the charter to review edits.

Brooks Belanger began walking the commission through the charter to review each section and any edits suggested by commission members since the last meeting.

Heck noted that Belanger and Snow would make edits in real-time so the commission can approve the document in as close to a completed form as possible.

Snow asked Patel to speak on his suggestion to change the term limit language to limit any individual to three terms in one position. Patel explained he preferred a system that limited an individual to three total terms in a particular position.

The commission discussed Patel's proposition and called for a vote.

Patel moved to adopt the draft language to limit a council member to three total terms on the city council. Browning seconded. The motion carried with Heck in opposition.

Plant asked the commission how a three-term limit would affect potential terms shorter than four years. The commission agreed to clarify the draft language to reflect a prohibition on running for a subsequent term if an individual has already served more than two-and-a-half elected terms.

Belanger introduced language on reimbursements to ensure the city council specifies policies on reimbursement in Article I, Section 2-4.

Heck moved to approve the draft language as amended. Browning provided a second. Without opposition, the motion carried.

The commission discussed the usage of "law" or "ordinance" and sought clarity on which term is most applicable.

Belanger introduced proposed changes in Article I, Section 2-9 that streamline the process of introducing and adopting an ordinance. The proposed changes allow an ordinance to be introduced at one meeting and approved at a subsequent meeting without calendar day requirements imposed between meetings. The commission reached consensus on this change.

Belanger introduced a proposed change in Article I, Section 2-11 to change "shall" to "must" in reference to the city council's obligation to state the emergency claimed for an emergency ordinance. The commission unanimously agreed to this change.

Heck moved to remove Article I, Section 2-12, Codes of Technical Regulations, as duplicate language. Tarleton seconded. Without opposition, the motion carried.

Belanger introduced the removal of language regarding compiling records in a book or books, since modern state law allows for electronic records. The commission unanimously agreed to this change.

Browning and Heck discussed a proposed change to the language regarding the evaluation of the city manager. The commission agreed to alter the performance review language to ensure the city council evaluates the city manager's performance at least once annually.

Plant introduced a discussion on the possible conflict between the chief of police and public safety and the mayor in emergency situations. Heck and Snow clarified the differences between the roles of both the chief of police and public safety and the mayor in a future emergency situation and emphasized that the proposed language does not create a conflict.

Belanger introduced proposed qualifications for individuals seeking the offices of mayor or city council that require these individuals to have been domiciled in St. George for at least one year prior to seeking office. Murrell argued in support of the requirement that an individual seeking office must have been domiciled for at least one year and suggested the commission strike any residency language as it could be legally conflicting with the domicile requirement.

Heck moved to adopt language as discussed. Murrell seconded. Without opposition, the motion carried.

The commission agreed to use the word “set” when referring to the city council’s ability to determine compensation for city officials consistently throughout the document.

The commission shifted discussion to the city council’s ability to govern the decisions of the city manager. The commission agreed to shift the city council’s ability to reject an acting city manager designee from an action requiring an ordinance to a resolution. Additionally, the commission discussed a requirement for the city manager to live within the boundaries of St. George and decided to leave this decision to the city council.

Heck introduced a discussion around the chief of public safety. He explained this position is extremely important to the public and is therefore crucial to the ability of the charter to pass a vote of the people. Heck proposed renaming the position to chief of police and public safety to reflect public concern for crime prevention and safety in the area.

Tarleton, Hoffpauir, and Plant spoke in support of the proposal.

Tarleton moved to adopt the proposal. Heck seconded. Without opposition, the motion carried.

Snow asked the commission to consider the application of the three-term maximum limit established previously for city council members to the mayor and the chief of police and public safety. The commission noted the mayor and chief of public safety positions were already subject to term limits and expressed an interest in creating consistency across all positions.

The commission agreed to reflect the changes to term limits adopted for the city council section in the mayor and chief of police and public safety sections of the charter.

Plant asked the commission to consider bonding requirements for the council administrator position. The commission agreed to add a general requirement for the bonding of officers as specified by the city council.

Heck asked the commission to reconsider Article IV on initiatives and referendums. Heck explained the importance of keeping a referendum process since the city was essentially created by referendum, but simultaneously noted the presence of special interest groups that may take advantage of weak referendum laws. Heck suggested increasing the requirement to 25% of registered voters.

Murrell noted that the referendum process as outlined does not have a direct-action component; instead, it only places an item on the city council agenda.

After discussion, the commission agreed to maintain the 15% requirement as written but add a requirement that each signature be accompanied by a witness signature.

Tarleton introduced a discussion on challenges with EMS service. Tarleton asked the commission to include St. George Fire Protection District No. 2 as an approved EMS provider for the city in the corresponding language in Article VI, Section 2 of the charter.

Mayor Dustin Yates followed Tarleton's introduction with support and proposed language to allow St. George Fire Protection District No. 2 to provide EMS services in the future.

Murrell moved to approve the language proposed by Yates. Cook seconded. The motion carried with Heck in opposition.

Heck moved to approve the addition of Article VI, Section 6 on bonding of officers. Tarleton seconded. Without opposition, the motion carried.

Belanger introduced language detailing the calling of a charter review commission every ten years as discussed by the charter commission.

The commission discussed the proposed language and agreed to adopt technical edits to align Article VI, Section 7 with Louisiana law and create consistency with other sections.

Heck moved to approve Article VI, Section 7 as written with technical amendments. Tarleton seconded. Without opposition, the motion carried.

Belanger introduced the addition of a severability clause. He explained this clause is commonly found in charters in Louisiana, and the commission agreed to the adoption of this language without opposition.

Belanger asked the commission to consider the proposed transition language and introduced specific topics in the transition. He explained the transition section covers the transition of elections, effective date of the charter if it is passed, and a provision that allows the continuation of passed ordinances and city actions.

The commission then discussed the staggering of future terms and decided to begin the cycle of staggering terms with the fall elections of 2029.

Additionally, the commission agreed to a number of minor technical changes discuss by commission members to better align the charter with state and parish laws and procedures previously established in the charter.

APPROVAL OF DRAFT HOME RULE CHARTER

Tarleton moved to approve the proposed home rule charter as amended. Murrell provided a second. Heck, Cook, Browning, Hoffpauir, Monroe, Murrell, Patel, Plant, and Tarleton voted in favor of the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

NEXT STEPS

Heck and Cook explained the charter will proceed to the city council for a vote to send the charter to a vote of the people. They asked every member of the commission to attend the November 12th city council meeting as a show of support for the proposed home rule charter.

PUBLIC COMMENT

A member of the public submitted a comment thanking the commission for their time and effort in creating the home rule charter. He expressed appreciation for the respect the commission showed throughout the process and shared his respect for the professionalism each commission member displayed.

ADJOURN

Monroe moved to adjourn. Hoffpauir seconded. Without objection, the motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.