



ST. GEORGE CHARTER COMMISSION MEETING 4

MEETING MINUTES

WELCOME & ROLL CALL

Councilman Ryan Heck, Commission Chairman, called the meeting of the St. George City Charter Commission to order at 5:31 p.m. on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.

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

Chairman Heck called for and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MEETING 3 MINUTES

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

REVIEW DRAFT CHARTER

Before beginning, Heck addressed the commission and reminded members of the purpose of the document and the importance of capturing key decision points reflecting the founders' vision for the city, with the opportunity to amend later if needed.

Browning emphasized the importance of balancing that mindset with the need for the charter to be the best it can be for people today and not just in the future.

KEY SECTIONS

Snow introduced the schedule for the meeting, describing the need to further discuss city council elections, mayoral elections, the budget process, charter amendments, and the chief of public safety position.

Brooks Belanger, a member of Snow's team, walked through each section of the draft charter with the commission and addressed where decisions were necessary.

Belanger began with the need for a decision on councilmember elections and how the commission would like to stagger terms. Belanger provided the commission with two options for staggering.

The commission agreed on one at-large position, two district positions, and the mayor being elected to four-year terms in 2029, with three district positions and an at-large position being elected to two-year terms with the contingency that in 2031, all positions will be elected to four-year terms.

Murrell motioned to approve the staggering language as discussed. Heck seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

Belanger transitioned to a discussion of the charter language regarding the mayoral election. Belanger explained that the draft charter included language specifying that the mayor's election cycle shall be concurrent with the four-year terms of the council that begins in 2029. This will ensure that the mayor of St. George will always be elected to a four-year term.

Murrell motioned to approve the mayor's terms as written in the draft charter. Monroe seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

Hoffpauir brought up a discussion on the language about establishing an operating budget for the city. DeCuir noted that this section should be in accordance with state law.

Murrell motioned to approve the operating budget requirements as written in the draft charter in accordance with state law. Browning seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

The commission discussed and agreed to mirror the timelines for the development of both the capital and operating budgets. The timeline for both the capital and operating budgets shall be consistent with the procedures established in state law relative to municipal operating budgets.

The commission discussed the number of votes an amendment to the charter would need to obtain from the city council.

Heck motioned to set the number of votes needed for charter amendments to a 3/4 majority. Murrell seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

Heck asked the commission to share their opinions on the inclusion of a referendum section. Murrell emphasized the importance of the section and its inclusion considering the history and values of St. George.

Murrell motioned to approve the inclusion of the proposed referendum language in the draft charter. Hoffpauir seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

Snow reintroduced the Chief of Public Safety position and whether it would be appointed or elected.

Tarleton expressed an interest in the position being elected and saw the importance of leaving this position in the hands of the people. Browning countered that it would be better for this to be an appointed position and that the public would have a say since they elect their council members who would be responsible for appointing this position.

Murrell stated the position should not be enumerated in the charter and that the discussion would not be taking place without the Lawrason Act enumerating a police chief.

The commission requested the opinion of the city attorney, Sheri Morris, about the ability to attach qualifications to the role. Morris confirmed that the city can establish qualifications for an elected position.

Hoffpauir noted that this position is unique to St. George and that there is no real precedent for it. Heck asked who the chief of public safety would report to if they were elected.

Murrell emphasized that the future council could create job descriptions for the chief of public safety position if the role is appointed, which would allow for modification and changes as needed.

Murrell moved for the council to appoint the chief of public safety position, with roles and responsibilities defined by ordinance, with Browning seconding the motion. DeCuir, Browning, and Murrell voted in favor, with Hoffpauir, Tarleton, Plant, and Monroe voting against. Heck abstained from the vote. The motion failed.

Hoffpauir moved to have the chief of public safety be elected with qualifications. Tarleton seconded. Hoffpauir subsequently withdrew the motion, citing commission members absent from the meeting.

Murrell moved to table the conversation of the chief of public safety to the next commission meeting. Hoffpauir seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

The commission then went line by line and discussed the rest of the charter at length.

Murrell moved to remove section C listed under Article I, Section 1-02, *Special Powers*, of the draft charter. Monroe seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

The commission confirmed that term limits will be enforced for council members serving consecutive terms on the city council, even if these terms are not in the same office. The commission reasoned that a council position is a council position despite being district-based or at-large.

The commission discussed the importance of the inclusion of a reapportionment section. Morris noted that Louisiana election code controls redistricting and that it would be beneficial to cross-reference the two.

The commission then transitioned to a discussion on a line in the charter discussing interdiction processes. The commission agreed to keep what was written in the draft charter.

When discussing the topic of vacancies, the council agreed to defer to state law and asked that relevant statutes be reviewed in advance of the next meeting.

The commission agreed to keep thirty days as the length of time for an ordinance to become effective.

Yates addressed the commission regarding the powers and duties of the mayor. He emphasized the importance of there being a balance between the council and the mayor, and that creating an appointment process between the council and the mayor is mutually beneficial.

Heck initiated a discussion suggesting that language in the draft charter referencing all board, commission, and council committee appointments should be between the mayor and the council.

Yates further emphasized the importance of the mayor being involved in the appointment process.

Heck motioned for the mayor to make appointments for all boards, commissions, and council committees, subject to council approval. Hoffpauir seconded. With no opposition, the motion passed.

Murrell reopened the conversation of giving the mayor veto power.

Murrell motioned to grant the mayor veto power with the council able to override with a unanimous vote. Tarleton seconded. Heck opposed the motion and offered a substitute motion.

Heck motioned for the mayor to have veto power with the council able to override with a supermajority vote. Hoffpauir seconded. With no opposition the motion passed.

The commission agreed to leave the position of mayor pro tempore as written in the charter.

The commission voiced an interest in adding a clause to the city manager role that it would be more fully described in an ordinance.

Heck motioned that the city council must have a supermajority vote when voting to remove the city manager. Murrell seconded. With no opposition the motion passed.

The commission agreed to keep the language regarding departments, offices, and agencies and general provisions.

Commission members expressed an interest in adding to the Chief of Public Safety responsibilities a duty to maintain coordination with the Louisiana State Police.

That last section of the charter addresses transition and severability. Morris issued advice on what to include in this section and offered to map out how this section could look from a legal perspective. The main point addressed was how to navigate the election schedule after March.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public were provided an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the end of the meeting. Several members voiced comments and asked questions, with one member emphasizing the importance of having an elected chief of public safety, another addressing the importance of further building out the section discussing interdiction and implementing ad hoc committees that are multidisciplinary, another confirming key elements of the discussion among the commission, and one echoing the importance of the chief of public safety having broad coordination responsibilities focused on public safety.

NEXT STEPS

The commission agreed to host its meeting on Wednesday, October 9, which will also serve as a community meeting to receive feedback on the draft charter from the St. George community.

ADJOURNMENT

After discussions, the commission no longer had a quorum so the meeting adjourned.