

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 1, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, George Estrada, Florisca Carter, Charles Valentino, Jr.; Ruben Felipe, William Marshall, Harry Weichsel

OTHER: Frances Wilson, Assistant City Clerk; Fleeta Hudson, City Clerk; Atty. Ed Maley, Atty. Steven Mednick, Council Member Andre Baker, Council Member Angel de Para, Council President Thomas McCarthy, Council Member Susan Brannelly, Council Member Lydia Martinez

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m.

**DISCUSSION OF THE CHARTER WITH THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS
OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Council President McCarthy presented several items for discussion to the Charter Revision Committee. Council President McCarthy listed a number of key points that had been discussed by the Council. Council President McCarthy then said thanks to the Charter Revision Committee on the behalf of the Council. The Council members recognized that the Commission members are giving up significant portions of their personal lives to perform this task.

Council Present McCarthy then opened up discussion on the first key item, a discussion of the re-election process and the length of the terms for council members and stated that there had already been some informal discussion on the matter. Council President McCarthy then spoke of an informal poll regarding terms for council members of 2 and 4 years in length and stated that the results had been divided evenly. A discussion then followed on the individual merits between a 2-year term and a 4-year term including some of the following points.

- Frequency of re-elections and cost
- Accountability
- Logistics
- Potential for needless election
- Removal of unfavorable members.

Council President McCarthy then mentioned a third suggestion of staggering 4-year elections so that every two years half of the Council will be up for re-election.

Council President McCarthy brought up the next key item; a discussion of making half of the Council and make them 'at-large' members. There was a suggestion to have the City-Council President run the council meetings. Council President McCarthy said he would not be unwilling to run the meetings, but felt that it was a great disservice to the city to not have the mayor present at the meetings. Council President McCarthy then stated the next key item which was that the council felt it was important for the council members to have the ability to hire and fire its own staff, consultants as they choose, and advisors. He reviewed the details of the current system for the commission.

He stated that these were all of the current issues and if any new ones arose that they would either be sent to the committee in written form or be discussed in a combined meeting. Council President McCarthy was asked if he was currently using the City Clerk's office as staff and if he was looking to hire his own staff. Council President McCarthy said that the City Clerk's office does not work for the council 'per-say' and the legislative office works for the city council. Discussion followed about the tasks of the legislative office.

Council President McCarthy was asked why he felt it was important for the council to be able to hire attorneys. Council President McCarthy replied that there were times when it was important for the council to be able to receive independent assessments of situations. He then provided an example where the necessity for an independent assessment was needed. Council President McCarthy was asked if he was asking for permission or if he was having difficulty with the request having to be sent through the City Attorney's office. Council President McCarthy replied that, currently, the City Attorney's office selects the attorney and the council wanted to be able to select the attorney. A question was raised as to if this hiring would be permanent or on an 'as needed' basis. Council President McCarthy responded that he thought it would be on an 'as needed' basis. One of the controls pointed out for this would be that the council would have to pay for the attorney with their budget. Further discussion followed on the specific legal details and requirements for hiring of an outside attorney for this proposed revision.

A question was raised about the proposal to make half of the council members 'at-large' concerning voting districts and turnouts. In particular, keeping the council from being dominated by one or two members from districts with distinctly higher voter turnouts than other districts. Council Member Baker replied that one of the issues that would need to be addressed would be having council members think of the city as a whole instead of focusing only on matters that affect their own districts. Council Member Baker then outlined the proposed plan for who would be selected to become a Council Member at large. An issue was raised regarding minority representation on the at-large selection. Concerns were voiced regarding making such a large change without exploring other options. Council President McCarthy stated that he was against the idea of minority representation for the 'at-large' members. He then went on to explain his reasoning for this.

The discussion moved to the role of the Mayor within council meetings. It was noted that the Mayor only presides over the meetings instead of running them. Further discussion followed.

The discussion turned to the Board of Education. Council President McCarthy said that he would have more confidence in the money allocated to the Board of Education if he knew where the money was going. He then said he was hopeful that the newly appointed Board of Education members would be more forthcoming about problems and issues. He expressed that he sensed that the council would like to have more control over the Board of Education and that the council would like to have a role with the process.

Council President McCarthy was then asked what he felt the needed changes would be. Council President McCarthy stated that previous boards had dealt with many difficult issues. He then went on to state that he felt the current board had the interests of the Bridgeport schools foremost in their minds. Commissioner Estrada stated that he would like to have the Council present when working through these issues. Council Member Brannelly said that she was extremely hopeful about the outcome of the collaborative efforts in systems, IT, payroll, and security. Commissioner Felipe asked what the suggestions were regarding the potential perception of having the city council interfere with the Board of Education. He wanted to know what kind of checks and balances could be put into place. Council President McCarthy said that he views it as the Council being an independent department in the city of Bridgeport. He pointed out that the State Department of Education also has control over what happens with the Bridgeport Board of Education.

Council Member Baker stated that he felt that one of the things that would be good to do would be to require the Board of Education to perform internal audits. Council Member Baker expressed his ideas regarding this change. Commissioner Simpson said that there would be many presentations on this issue over the next month. Commissioner Marshall said that he felt one of the problems was with distrust between the Board of Education and the Council and that some problems would be resolved if there could be more trust between the two groups. Council President McCarthy commented that it made no sense for the city to be voting on their budget before the state finalized their budget.

The next key point was on redistricting. Council President McCarthy stated that, currently, the city does their redistricting before the state which creates problems with polling and elections as well as making small 'pockets of districts' that can be as small as one block that are required to be considered separate polling districts by state law. Council President McCarthy said that the cost of setting up separate polling locations for these districts was a complete waste of money and caused problems. Council President McCarthy stated that the city couldn't remove an ordinance without the mayor starting the process. Attorney Mednick asked for a reference on that.

Council President McCarthy stated that the Council wanted library board appointments to be the same as other board appointments. Commissioner Estrada asked what the state ordinance on libraries would cover. Council President McCarthy stated that he was not comfortable with the library having a mandatory mill that the library could now spend without oversight. Council Member Brannelly pointed out that both the library and education are departments of the city but governed by boards. She expressed her wish that both the library and the Board of Education would work together with the Council. A discussion followed concerning the councils relationship with the library.

Council Member de Para reminded everyone present that the library budget had been determined by referendum. He said that the issue was accountability and he was concerned about the 'us vs. them' mentality in regards to government. Council Member Brannelly noted that she is the city council liaison to the library board and would be challenged to represent them as a liaison as they are not very forthcoming. She said that there was the same difficult dynamic with the library board as with the Board of Education. She had concerns about if all the residents of Bridgeport were being represented because they had the ability to appoint their own people. Council Member Brannelly pointed out that they were talking about the charter, not people, mayors, commissioners, or board members and the main question is how does the charter need to read so that what is being represented is fair. She asked why is the library board any different than other commissions and there needs to be consistency on how this happens. She went on to express her frustrations that the library has been reluctant to communicate their plans and accomplishments. Council Member Martinez said that it would be very important for the voters to understand the changes and that the charter was very clear. Commissioner Estrada commented that there were going to be some public hearings and the library was welcome to attend.

Commissioner Estrada said that there had been several concerns about city employees serving as council members. Council Member Brannelly said that it was the constitutional right of citizens of Bridgeport to run for office and that being employed by the city should not take away their constitutional right to run for office. Discussion followed.

Attorney Mednick handed out the upcoming agenda and the upcoming presenters biographies. At the upcoming March 6th meeting, Superintendent Vallas, Professor Viteritti, and Mr. Taylor will be speaking before the commission. There will be an opportunity to ask questions following the presentations.

ADJOURNMENT

**** THE MOTION TO ADJOURN WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER VALENTINO**

**** THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER SIMPSON**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 7:40.

Respectfully submitted,
Ian A. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services.