

Kansas City Charter Review Commission

Meeting Minutes

5.9.23

Those in attendance: Co-Chair Jack Steadman, Commissioners Margaret Jones, Michael McGee, Jenny Johnston, Eric Rose, Wilson Vance, and Adam Miller attend in-person. Co-Chair Karen Slaughter participated virtually after joining approximately 2 hours into the meeting. Commissioner Linda Brown joined in-person approximately 2 hours into the meeting. Reid Day and Morgan Said of the Mayor's Office, Matt Gigliotti of the Law Department, Tammy Queen of the City's Finance Department, and Marilyn Sanders and Howard Rice of the Clerk's Office also attended.

Co-Chair Steadman started the meeting with introductions and summary of prior meeting minutes up for approval by the Commission. All commissioners present approved meeting minutes for the public listening session held May 1, 2023 and May 8, 2023, and regular meeting minutes of the Commission's May 2, 2023 meeting.

Co-Chair Steadman provided a summary of public comments and feedback received during the previous evening's public listening session. The Commission noted no feedback in opposition to the proposal to create a centralized filing system in the City Clerk's Office and implement a random ballot order for candidates to appear on the ballot. The Commission unanimously recommended this proposal move forward and prepared as a recommendation to Council subject to final input at the next public listening session.

The Commission moved into consideration of public comment and potential changes to the City's election calendar. The Commission heard from Finance Department Director Tammy Queen who provided comment on the City's fiscal year and potential impacts if the City's election calendar is adjusted. The Commissioners followed up with questions to Ms. Queen and further discussed potential changes to the election calendar.

The Commission next discussed proposals to change how votes are tabulated and a potential runoff system for the City's elections. The Commissioners discussed public feedback and issues with ranked choice voting. The Commissioners considered requesting a closed session with the City Attorney regarding legal issues related to this proposal but did not move to make such a request.

The Commission next invited 2021 Redistricting Commission Chair Stephenie Smith to speak to redistricting and its relation to the Charter Review Commission's work. Ms. Smith spoke to the Commission in an effort to provide a clear recommendation that the Commission recommend a task force or commission be specifically convened to review and study the appropriate number and allocation between in-district and at-large Council districts. Ms. Smith noted this will be a big project that should be done in a deliberate and specific review with a diverse set of experts that can provide modeling of different scenarios and outcomes dependent on the City's population in advance of the next redistricting commission's work following the next census.

The Commission then moved into a discussion of the proposed timeline and potential to submit a report with recommendations to Council. The Commission did not yet determine to extend its timeframe and committed to evaluating proposals and timing following the upcoming public listening session.

The Commission moved into the public comment portion of the meeting from those attending the meeting in-person and those attending via Zoom. Comments related to ranked choice voting, the City's election calendar, and the timing of the Commission's work.

Following a break, the Commission discussed whether to advance proposals for recommendation to Council. Several Commissioners expressed a desire to reject any change to the City's election calendar and questioned whether to adopt any runoff proposal. The Commission requested Law to provide additional redlines related to potential runoff provisions, including language that would set the threshold to advance to Council from the primary at a 2/3rds majority, and to separately consider a "Clay County model" that is derived from the Clay County Charter's provisions related to how the County conducts their elections. The Commission also determined it would include a specific recommendation for a redistricting task force to study the appropriate makeup of the City Council.

The Commission then moved into discussing petition thresholds in Article VII of the Charter. The Commissioners agreed to separate consideration of initiative petition and referendum petitions from recall provisions, and to make a recommendation based on Columbia, Missouri's model that sets a "floor" for such petitions while retaining potential higher threshold based on total votes cast in the last Mayoral election. Related to recall provisions, the Commissioners identified a need to consider in-district recall thresholds, as well as generally where to set the "floor" for such petitions.

The Commission meeting ended with a discussion of the Commission's timeline and identification of additional questions to consider. The Mayor's office spoke to the stated desire to have the current Council consider proposed changes and noted a transit tax renewal was expected to be placed on the August ballot whereas no election was anticipated in November. The Commission identified the compressed nature of the Commission's charge to complete work in a short period of time, while also noting several common themes related to voter education were not appropriate to write into the Charter. Commissioners also noted that they could maintain the status quo with few recommended change in delivering a final report.

The meeting adjourned.