

MINUTES
WEST ST. PAUL CHARTER COMMISSION
Thursday, October 6, 2022
5:30 P.M.
MUNICIPAL CENTER
COUNCIL CHAMBERS

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Commissioners Tim Valento, Matthew Schempp, Andrea Friesen, Jim Probst, Michelle Ball, Chris Gevara, Tim Haubrich, Carol Keyes-Ferrer, Chair Doug Fromm

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Commissioners Mark Tessmer, Kae Jae Johnson

OTHERS PRESENT:

City Manager Nate Burkett, City Attorney Kori Land, Liaison Eng-Sarne, Councilmember Eastman, Andrew Olson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Fromm called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

3. ADOPT AGENDA

Motion by Probst/Friesen to adopt the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

4. ADOPT MINUTES

Motion by Probst/Friesen to approve the minutes. Motion passed unanimously.

5. NEW BUSINESS

A. Changing Council Pay

Chair Fromm explained that the Commission is required to review Council salaries by June in even-numbered years. He indicated there was some interest from Council members in having the Commission discuss increasing the Council salaries more substantially than the 3% annual increase for 2023 and 2024. City Manager Burkett summarized his memo and offered comparable Council salary information from surrounding and similar communities.

Councilmember Eastman approached the Commission and indicated that there are reasons to support increasing the salaries to encourage more people to run for office. She stated that there has been a significant time increase in the last couple of years needed to serve as a Council member due to the volume of activity. She estimated her time commitment averages 15 hours a week for the various committees and commissions upon which she serves, preparation for all meetings as well as constituent responses and interactions. Commissioner Keyes-Ferrer asked for clarification about the requirement to be on other committees and Councilmember Eastman provided additional information.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne added that each Councilmembers' time commitment varies but that she recognizes it is public service and does not serve for the salary.

Commissioner Keyes-Ferrer asked if increasing the salary will attract a more diverse Council. Commissioner Friesen asked if the City could do a survey of the community to see if the salary is hindering public involvement. Commissioner Haubrich offered his perspective as a former Councilmember that he thinks the commitment has changed over time and the salary increase is warranted.

Chair Fromm provided comments from Councilmember Gulley that the time commitment is cost-prohibitive for some because, for instance, they work second jobs or would need to pay for child care. Councilmember Gulley sees this as a diversity issue and wants to carve out the ability for all to be able to serve, including renters who make up half of the population of the City. Commissioner Haubrich responded that the Councilmember "job" is not a good fit for everyone. Commissioner Ball asked if a higher salary solves the problem or if there is a way to have equal distribution of workload amongst Councilmembers.

City Manager Burkett said that this Council is the most active Council with which he has ever worked. But the problem is that while this Council is very involved and active and may be deserving of additional pay, you cannot guarantee that the next Council will be as active. Commissioner Keyes-Ferrer commented that this Council has set a high bar that should be commended.

Chair Fromm said that there is accountability when Councilmembers are not responsive or active. He also pointed out that there was a period when Councilmembers rejected all raises, so the City is still trying to catch up. In a budget of \$30 million he believes a small raise is supportable and affordable. There was general support for a raise for the Mayor and Council salaries, but recognition that 2023 and 2024 raises have already been implemented.

The Commission agreed to discuss this subject again 2024 with a more robust analysis of hours and commitment that are more commensurate with the salary.

B. Discussion of Issues Raised by Andrew Olson

City Attorney Land reviewed her memo to the Commission on the issues raised by resident Andrew Olson.

The Commission agreed with the recommendation to amend Charter Section 3.03 to include the words “elected or appointed” so that it is clear it includes all council members, regardless as to how they filled their seat.

The Charter Commission discussed the timing of special elections for initiatives, which requires that if 15% of the voters signed a petition, then a special election would need to be held within 65 days after the date it was submitted to the Council, but if less than 15%, it would be held at the next regular municipal election.

Commissioner Schempp suggested that the Commission consider eliminating the 15% rule and have all questions submitted at the next regular municipal election. City Manager Burkett stated that for some measures, timing may be an issue and the flexibility to utilize the statutory predetermined special election dates might be beneficial. The Commission requested to see amendments for both initiatives and referenda to allow flexibility on the timing of special elections.

The Commission agreed with the recommendation to repeal Section 5.02 related to the prohibition for compensation paid to petition circulators.

Andrew Olson addressed the Commission with his concerns about the timing of a special election and urged the Commission to consider aligning with the statutory dates to ensure that initiatives are addressed in a timely manner.

C. Redistricting Discussion

City Attorney Land summarized her memo. Chair Fromm said he would like to have a way to have public comment on ideas for redistricting in advance of the legislature’s official redistricting, because of the tight timeline in state law. He suggested that the opportunity to review new ideas and options is hampered by the short window to consider any significant shifts in the Ward designations. He hopes there is a way to be as proactive as possible. City Manager Burkett said that having in-house access to GIS will assist greatly in being able to input census numbers in advance of the legislative action to start generating different ideas. Chair Fromm would like some way to ensure there is a reminder in advance of the next census so that there can be neighborhood meetings, community input and public engagement.

City Attorney Land offered that language could be included in the Charter to require the Charter Commission to review redistricting options, hold public engagement activities or form a committee in the fall prior to a redistricting event. The Commission supported that idea.

6. OLD BUSINESS

7. SET NEXT MEETING DATE

The Commission decided to hold at least 3 meetings in 2023, tentatively set for the 2nd Thursday in Feb., May and Oct. (Feb. 9, May 11, Oct. 12). The City can include these dates on its annual calendar and consider them the “regular” meetings of the Charter Commission. Upcoming Agenda items: Various Charter Amendments.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Friesen/Probst. Unanimous. The meeting was adjourned at 6:47.

DRAFT