

PORTLAND CHARTER COMMISSION MINUTES of JULY 16, 2009

The scheduled meeting of the Portland Review Charter Commission was called to order at 5:10 p.m., with Commissioners Mermin, Spritz, O'Brien, Cohen, Valleau, Plumb, Trevororrow, Smith, and Chipman present.

The Chair requested public comment on any item on agenda. None given.

Motion to approve the minutes of July 2, 2009 (Valleau/Mermin). Unanimously approved.

Houskeeping items on Commission's procedural rules.

Proxies: Discussion on issue of use of proxies; concern expressed that it is inconsistent with how other city boards and commissions operate; appearance that person has made up mind before the debate and public hearing; problem of changes in item from what appears on the agenda. No consensus.

Telephone attendance: Motion to allow member of Charter Commission, when unable to attend, be able to participate by telephone (Valleau/Smith). Discussion that it should only be used rarely. Must have a legitimate reason for non-attendance in person, e.g. in California on business.

Motion to amend that telephone attendance be used only in extraordinary circumstances. (Cohen/Smith). Amendment passed unanimously. Main motion passed as amended 9-1 (Gooch)

Discussion of having a two-meeting process for significant decisions, i.e. have a first reading and discussion and then follow up with further discussion and vote at next meeting (or have first reading with no discussion, followed by discussion at next meeting). Should be used for important issues only such as recommendations to Council for ballot questions. Can also workshop items prior to first reading.

Commissioners Smith, O'Brien and Chipman to meet separately on 2 reading issue and make recommendations back to full Commission.

Meetings: Chair discussed feedback she received. All but one person wanted an earlier start time and 2d and 4th Thursdays worked best. Due to vacation schedules, however, only one meeting in August is possible (8/27). Meeting on July 30 added to schedule. Next meeting is at 5:30 p.m. in Council Chambers on Thursday July 30, 2009, followed by August 27 meeting. Thereafter the regular schedule is the second and fourth Thursdays of each month.

#5 – Jim Gooch, summarized report from himself and Comm. Mermin on “Technology for Community Engagement”

Discussion on separate website/blog which is easier to use and more intuitive than City website. Issues raised: Need to avoid a “virtual” meeting of Commission; duplication; concern about use of blog; who would be administrator for it; alternative use of a Yahoo group suggested; screening of content. Not intended to be a typical blog; just want public to be able to communicate with Commission, not interactive.

Commissioners Gooch and Mermin will continue to work on this issue.

5:55 p.m. Meeting recessed to end of public hearing.

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Business Meeting reconvened at 7:15 p.m. after public hearing.

Further brainstorming on purpose of and ways to get public input during overall Commission process:

- *Continue traditional way which many citizens are used to and familiar with;
- *Goal is to get the community and Commission to the same point in the end;
- *Need to inform the public on a regular basis as to where the Commission is.
- *Monthly column in PPH and other papers possible?
- *Community design workshops;
- *Neighborhood meetings in each district and Peaks Island.
- *Down side of charette style workshops which may lead to belief that whatever is decided is what the Commission will do. Not Commission’s job to take a public opinion poll; must use its judgment. This style may be ill suited for these types of abstract, complicated issues, e.g. line item veto for Mayor.
- *Role of Commission is in part to solicit opinion and in part to educate; give people the sense that they have been heard. Important to be educators and informers rather than advocates.
- *Need to set as a goal to have a very accessible site to take e-mails. Also need to let people know the e-mail has been received and will be reviewed. Important that we define the issues for each of the hearings – don’t need to hear same point from same person over and over.
- *Involving public is important but need experts to come in from different communities; do research. Will be seeking lots of different paths of input.
- *Have two different processes – to give information and to get input. People learn in different ways and have some forums that are non-traditional. Would be helpful for some to members of public to engage in greater depth.
- *Should go very broadly, and should seek input and opportunity to educate. At end, need to have people brought along with us.
- *Possible use of focus groups.

Public engagement committee of Comms. Spritz, Davis, Smith and Mermin to report back by 8/27. Comm. Spritz to take lead getting committee together
Deferred discussion on Item #8, background research needed, to July 30th. Send e-mail to Chair if have any feelings about the item but bring hard copy to meeting and read it.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.