

PORTLAND CHARTER COMMISSION MINUTES of AUGUST 27, 2009

The scheduled meeting of the Portland Review Charter Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m., with Commissioners Cohen (Acting Chair), Valleau, Mermin, Spritz, O'Brien, Gooch, Davis, Trevorrow, Chipman, Ranaghan and Smith present.

Agenda Item #2. The Acting Chair called for public comment on the Commission's agenda. There was none.

Agenda Item #3. Commissioner Ranaghan moved approval of the July 30, 2009, minutes; seconded by Comm. Mermin; passed unanimously

Agenda #4. Announcements from Commissioners: Comm. Gooch announced he will be in Portland, Oregon this month and hopes to meet with City officials and to get him any questions any Commissioner might like him to ask.

Comm. Mermin distributed an informational handout on "deliberative discussion".

Agenda Item #5.a. Plan -Public Engagement - Comm. Spritz.

Discussion followed on the Commission's role in public engagement particularly once their final report is issued; should the Commissioners be advocates of the final recommendations? Some commissioners did not feel this was within the charge of Commission which would be disbanded 30 days after final report. Others distinguished between advocacy as an individual rather than as a Commissioner or as the Commission. Still others distinguished between engagement and education, versus advocacy. Consensus that individuals can advocate but the Commission as a whole can provide factual information about what the recommendations mean and keep a line between facts and advocacy.

Agenda Item #5.b. re: panel discussion – Comm. Spritz

Report submitted on possible locations; addition of St. Lawrence Performing Arts Center suggested. Discussion of how to structure the panel and who could be on it (see handout): should the primary audience be the Commission, with questions from the members, and then followup with public? Should there be academic representation on the panel, particularly on the broader issues, e.g. form of government, with local people on the specific topic? Should some of the suggested participants, e.g. former Finance Director, be brought in to discuss their areas of expertise, rather than on mayor-manager issue. A workshop roundtable discussion with 2-3 people was suggested. List of Topics to be addressed from the 7/30 meeting and the order in which the panels might be convened was reviewed. The issue of information sharing versus getting opinions from panelists was discussed and whether there should be panels at all was reviewed. Consensus reached to have the panels, and to work to have them be balanced in points of view.

Motion made to have Commissioner Spritz work with the Executive Committee to convene a panel on leadership and vision, drawn from list within driving distance of Portland. (Gooch/Mermin). Discussion on contacting Burlington Vt which has an elected mayor and rank voting. Motion passed unanimously.

Agenda #5. c.- Facebook page – Comm. Gooch

Have contacted person who set up Portland Charter Commission pages; eventually going to meet them and see if can work with them. If not, will set up an “official” facebook page for the Commission.

Agenda #6. – Comm. Mermin

Introduction of Elizabeth Tarasevich who has volunteered to do bibliographic work for the Commission. Discussion of what this means – will things be on the city website, Charter Commission page, will there be a research library? Ms. Tarasevich suggested that we contact the Portland Public Library to see if we can keep hard copies of materials there. There could also be an online repository and would be logical to put on city website. Will contact them all and get their suggestions. Comm. Smith stated he would ask PPL about hard copies and approach the library to have a “repository” of the related materials.

Discussion of intern issue and handout of peer cities used in Chamber report; the first question for Ms. Tarasevich would be “has there been a survey of peer cities already done”? In regard to an intern, we have hard copies of charters from other cities but perhaps an intern could investigate how it is actually working in various cities; have intern call, read newspapers, talk to cities, what seems to be working; what doesn’t seem to be working. Is this a good idea? Cost would generally be a stipend of \$1000-2000. Initial issue is whether we want an intern. Discussion of issue of timing of having an intern and the availability of research from places like NLC, Finance Officers Association, ICMA, MMA, MSMA, NLC, Conference of Mayors etc. Majority agreement that it is not timely for an intern, should wait until issues are better formulated. Would like information about various organizations and what they can provide and research issues should be guided by Executive Committee.

Agenda Item #7: Issues/work plan

Discussion of points under Issue list work plan. Would like to have Executive Committee take the information back and recommend a tangible work plan. Long discussion followed on how to proceed on the issues, and when to start drafting and voting. Commission wants ongoing look at technical changes while substantive issues are being discussed. Role of subcommittees, if any. Ask the fundamental questions of what is not working and is any change needed? Should there be a “process” subcommittee to recommend how to proceed? Should leadership and vision and then city/school relationship be the first two issues? Agreeing on an issue on a preliminary basis does not mean it’s a final Commission decision. Final decisions will not be made until much later. Should have an ongoing look at technical language of charter and get opinions from relevant city staff to give feedback on language which does or doesn’t work in current Charter. Concern expressed about “issue overload”, i.e. the leadership & vision area has several subsessions and that will be a lot to handle.

Motion made that the topic of next meeting be “should Portland have a popularly elected mayor and if so, for what term” (Smith/Valleau). Discussion that this motion is without the intention of answering those questions; really to generate research questions. It would just start the discussion, and figure out what the Commission wants to know and have researched. Motion passed unanimously

Motion made to request City Manager that he invite the City department heads to report in writing to the Commission about technical changes needed to the current Charter within 30 days. (Smith/Valleau). Passed unanimously.

Motion made to request the Superintendent of Schools to issue a written report to the Commission of any technical changes needed to the current Charter in 30 days. (Smith/Gooch). Passed unanimously.

The Executive Committee should take lead in deciding how to proceed at the next meeting.

Agenda Item #8: Comm. Smith –

Brief presentation on two reading item. Premise is that issues not sneak up on anyone; that at end of process there will be a final set of recommendations which will have a two reading process. There would be preliminary votes along the way but not final votes. Motion made to take Comm. Smith’s report under advisement (Gooch/Mermin) – passed unanimously

Motion to adjourn Ranaghan/Mermin; passed unanimously.