

**Charter Review Commission
Pinellas County
January 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

The Pinellas County Charter Review Commission (CRC), as created by Chapter 80-950, Laws of Florida, met in regular session at 6:00 PM on this date in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Brian Aungst, Jr., Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Appointee (Commissioner Chris Latvala), Chair
Linsey Grove, Public At-Large Citizen Appointee, Vice-Chair
Anne-Marie Brooks, Municipal Elected Official Appointee
Richard Butler, BCC Appointee (Commissioner Kathleen Peters)
Dave Eggers, County Commissioner, BCC Appointee
Todd Jennings, Public At-Large Citizen Appointee
Terri Lipsey Scott, BCC Appointee (Commissioner René Flowers)
Ashley Overend, BCC Appointee (Commissioner Brian Scott) (appeared virtually)
Rob Posavec, BCC Appointee (Commissioner Dave Eggers)
Tom Steck, BCC Appointee (Commissioner Charlie Justice)
Mark Strickland, BCC Appointee (Commissioner Janet Long)

Not Present

Nick DiCeglie, Pinellas County State Legislative Delegation Appointee
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser, Constitutional Officers Appointee

Others Present

Nancy McKibben, County Staff Liaison, Assistant to the County Administrator
Wade Vose, Esquire, Vose Law Firm, CRC Legal Counsel
Doug Thomas, Strategic Government Resources, Inc.
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

All documents provided to the Clerk's Office have been filed and made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Aungst called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and welcomed the members.

ROLL CALL

At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

In response to the Chair's call for public comment, the following individuals appeared and expressed concerns:

Julie Vayne, Seminole
David Ballard Geddis, Jr., Palm Harbor
Barbara Haseldon, St. Petersburg

Later in the meeting, the Chair allowed for additional public comment; whereupon, the following individuals appeared and expressed concerns:

Greg Pound, Largo
Mack Johnson, Largo

REVIEW/APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 27, 2023 MEETING

Mr. Butler made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Commissioner Eggers and carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Review and Discussion Regarding Section 6.02 (Charter Initiative) – Citizen Initiative Persons and Referenda – Signature Percentage and Time Period for Charter Amendment Petition Drives

Chair Aungst provided brief opening comments regarding Section 6.02, indicating that Supervisor of Elections Julie Marcus is unable to attend tonight's meeting; that it is important for the members to understand how her office could be affected; and that Supervisor Marcus may attend a future meeting to provide her perspective.

Referring to documents in the agenda packet, Attorney Vose provided background information regarding the 2016 CRC's Charter amendment revising the signature percentage threshold and time limit for gathering signed petitions for Charter amendments, noting that the signature percentage was reduced from ten to eight percent of registered voters; and that the time limit for gathering signatures was increased from 180 to 240 days; whereupon, he referenced a chart which contains the methods by which

the 20 Florida charter counties may amend their charters by petition, noting that the percentages and times vary substantially.

In response to queries by Messrs. Strickland and Posavec, Attorney Vose provided information regarding his recollection of the reasoning for changing the signature percentage threshold from ten to eight percent of registered voters and his observations related to the volume of charter amendments after lowering the signature percentage threshold, such as in Brevard County where it is four percent.

Chair Aungst, with input from Attorney Vose, related that County Attorney Jewel White has requested that the CRC review Charter language that indicates that the Supervisor of Elections' office is required to approve ballot language. Following brief comments, he suggested that the language be removed or revised, and discussion ensued.

In response to comments and queries by Commissioner Eggers, and at the request of Chair Aungst, Ms. Haseldon provided brief comments regarding the County's signature percentage threshold and time limits.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Steck and Chair Aungst, Attorney Vose provided information related to actions taken by other charter counties regarding reviewing ballot language for citizen initiative petitions. He pointed out that petitions must be submitted to the Supervisor of Elections within a specific timeframe to allow ample opportunity for processing of initiative petitions prior to an election, and discussion ensued.

In summation, Chair Aungst expressed interest in lowering the signature percentage threshold from eight to five percent of registered voters, noting the challenges posed by the eight percent requirement, and Commissioner Eggers and Mr. Jennings provided supportive comments; whereupon, Mr. Jennings indicated that while he supports lowering the signature percentage threshold, he believes that the multi-district requirement should be maintained.

Thereupon, Chair Aungst requested that Mr. Thomas and Attorney Vose contact the Supervisor of Elections regarding her attendance at a future meeting.

Review and Discussion Regarding Proposed Pinellas County Charter Amendments on General Elections versus Other Elections

Attorney Vose indicated that the three methods for amending the Charter are via proposal by the BCC, an initiative petition by the voters, and by the CRC; whereupon, he, with input by Chair Aungst, provided additional information regarding each method.

Discussion ensued wherein Commissioner Eggers suggested changing the Charter to require that all Charter amendments by any of the three methods be placed only on general election ballots; whereupon, Chair Aungst requested that Attorney Vose prepare proposed language regarding Commissioner Eggers' suggestion and noted that the topic will be discussed further at a future meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Draft Ballot and Charter Language – Charter Amendment Revising Thresholds for Appointment and Removal of County Attorney

Attorney Vose referenced a discussion at a previous CRC meeting and reviewed proposed Charter language amending the criteria for selection, appointment, and removal of the County Attorney, noting that it is similar to the current Charter language for the County Administrator; and that it takes into consideration the 12-person County Attorney Oversight Committee (CAOC).

Commissioner Eggers expressed concerns regarding the proposed language pertaining to the required voting threshold for the removal of the County Attorney by the CAOC; whereupon, Chair Aungst and Attorney Vose provided information related to the voting threshold for the removal of the County Attorney by the CAOC at one meeting versus two consecutive meetings, pointing out that the rationale utilized for revising the language was to model the format used for the County Administrator and which is also a common provision in other municipal charters.

Following lengthy discussion, Attorney Vose indicated that he would prepare additional draft language for the Commission to review.

Initial Draft Ballot and Charter Language – County Charter Cleanup Amendment

Attorney Vose discussed proposed cleanup items previously identified by the Commission, including the removal of one-time provisions that have since occurred or lapsed, gender references, and references to boards that no longer exist. He indicated that the cleanup amendment would serve as a placeholder for additional cleanup items identified by the Commission; whereupon, he displayed the proposed ballot language for the amendment.

Proposed Florida House Bill 57 and Senate Bill 438 Regarding Term Limits for County Commissioners

Mr. Thomas provided information regarding pending legislation addressing term limits, noting that the bills propose eight-year term limits and other potential restrictions for county commissioners.

OTHER BUSINESS – NONE

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Chair Aungst indicated that the next meeting will occur on January 31 at 6:00 PM. Mr. Thomas discussed future meeting dates and potential conflicts; whereupon, following brief discussion, the members agreed to proceed with the meeting scheduled for February 26, to cancel the February 12 and 21 meeting dates, and to keep the meetings scheduled for the first and third Wednesdays in March and April.

CRC COMMISSIONER COMMENTS – NONE

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Aungst adjourned the meeting at 7:32 PM.