

MINUTES

FAIRFIELD CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

JUNE 17, 2009

Call to Order

Chairman Kevin Miller called the meeting of the Charter Review Commission to order at 5:40 p.m. in Room 162 of the Fairfield Municipal Building, 5350 Pleasant Avenue.

Roll Call

Dena Morsch, Recording Secretary, called the roll of the CRC. Present members were: Jerry Keller, Teresa Durbin, Bill Vidourek, Larry Williams, and Kevin Miller. Absent members Duane Roebuck and Jeff Rader were excused by a 5-0 vote of the Commission.

Approval of Minutes

Jerry Keller, seconded by Bill Vidourek, moved to approve the April 29, 2009 minutes as written. Motion Carried 5-0.

Discussion of Term Limits for Boards and Commissions

Chairman Miller explained that Mayor D'Epifanio had suggested during the April 29 meeting that the Commission consider term limits for members of Fairfield's boards and commissions so that more residents would have an opportunity to serve in the various board and commission positions. As a follow-up to the Mayor's suggestion, the Secretary solicited the opinions of City Council, senior staff members and current members of Fairfield's boards and commissions. A copy of the written statements received by the Commission is attached to these minutes. Chairman Miller stated the purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the comments received.

Liz Hunter, a member of the Environmental Commission, stated she would like to see the city expand their efforts to increase volunteerism in the City of Fairfield. She suggested when the city lists the volunteer opportunities in the city newsletter; volunteer opportunities should also be listed for the library, Mercy Hospital, One Way Farm, etc. Regarding the suggestion of term limits for board and commission members, Ms. Hunter stated there are already term limits in place. She stated when her term was up; she had to reapply for the position. If a person no longer matches the skill set that City Council is seeking, then Council can appoint a person who is a better match. Ms. Hunter stated she does not support term limits for boards and commissions.

Don Hassler, a member of the Parks and Recreation Board, stated his opposition to term limits. He stated Council can appoint and remove members of boards and commissions at any given time. He stated for many of the board and commissions, it is important for Council to appoint and reappoint residents who are doing a good job and have the experience needed for the particular position. Mr. Hassler noted that every Charter amendment that has come before the voters has passed because the voters trust Council to put forth issues that are truly deemed beneficial to the orderly operation of the City. He stated the proposal under consideration is not necessary; the system is not broken and if approved, would be an expense to the taxpayers of Fairfield that is not needed. Mr. Hassler pointed out that the Charter was recently reprinted in February 2009 following the Charter amendment that was approved by the voters in November 2008.

Tim Abbott, At-Large Councilmember and former member of the Civil Service Commission, thanked the members of the Charter Review Commission for the work they do to promote the quality of life in Fairfield. Councilmember Abbott stated he is opposed to term limits for boards and commissions. He noted that he and Councilmember Meyers submitted written comments to the Commission stating their positions. He stated the current system is working extremely well, noting that the City has received a lot of applications in the last few years from residents wishing to serve. He went on to say that he and Councilmember Meyers has proposed a new initiative called the Ambassador Committee whereby some of the applicants could be placed in order to gain experience before being moved into other roles when tenured volunteers decide to move on. Councilmember Abbott stated that is the way to handle it versus imposing term limits on people who are doing an outstanding job for the City of Fairfield. He stated that is his position as well as the position of Councilmember Tim Meyers who could not be present this evening.

Peg Collins, a 25-year member of the Planning Commission and founding member of the Charter Commission, voiced her opposition to term limits for board and commission members. She stated all of the positions are voluntary positions and the appointments should be apolitical; no one should be appointed for political reasons. Mrs. Collins stated the way the Charter is written now, it provides for balance, continuity and staggered terms which are necessary for the orderly operation of the City. She stated members appointed should be serious about their positions and educate themselves about the task at hand. Mrs. Collins stated term limits are not necessary because the mechanism is already in place for Council to remove those who are not doing a good job and to reappoint those who deserve another term of office.

Jerry Keller, Charter Review Commission member, stated it was very important for the Commission to receive comments from other board and commission members in order to help the Commission make their decision regarding the proposal under consideration.

Teresa Durbin, Charter Review Commission member, stated she reviewed all of the comments received and it is her opinion that the system is not broken so why fix it. She stated we may not have term limits per say but Council does have control. She stated if a member is not doing an effective job, that member can be removed or not reappointed when their term expires. Ms. Durbin stated the city is always talking about saving money and this proposed amendment would be costly to the residents if approved in November. She stated out of the 15 written responses received, eight were against term limits, one was not sure, one was in favor of term limits, and the others were in favor but only with stipulations which to her meant they were on the fence too. Ms. Durbin stated there are controls in place, the system is working so in her opinion, we should leave it the way it is.

Kevin Miller, CRC Chairman, stated after reviewing all the comments and listening to the comments this evening, he is of the opinion that the system is working—a board member can be removed; they don't have to be offered a spot the second time around; and there are a lot of different outlets and controls by City Council and he doesn't see an issue here that needs to be addressed by the city Charter.

Teresa Durbin noted that in most instances, it takes a new member a year or two to get their feet wet. The board or commission they are serving on comes up with a plan and before the plan can be implemented, if there is a term limit, you may not be able to see that plan that you worked so hard on come to fruition. She felt that that would be a travesty because everyone likes to see things through to the end, especially when you have worked hard and volunteered your time.

Councilmember Tim Abbott commented he served on the Civil Service Commission which was a very important commission. Right now, there are people serving on our various boards and commission with very impressive credentials. They are key players for the City of Fairfield and he would hate to see the city lose that expertise because of term limits.

Larry Williams, Charter Review Commission member, stated he understands the need for continuity on some of the boards and commissions. Other boards and commissions are good for first timers who are looking to get know the various officials in the city and learn about the issues. Mr. Williams thought by imposing term limits, we would be opening Pandora 's Box. He stated first of all, it would require this Commission to hold a lot of meetings; the Commission couldn't be done with their work in time to place the issue on the November ballot and even determining the different term limits would be a very involved process. Mr. Williams suggested that perhaps the Mayor's suggestion for term limits be tabled until next year when the Commission could take a look at the method by which Council uses to appoint members to the various boards and commissions. He stated at this point in time, he has not heard a good argument for term limits and therefore does not support the issue.

Don Hassler commented in many instances, members are appointed to serve on other boards. As an example, he was appointed by Council to serve on the Parks and Recreation Board and was appointed by the Parks & Recreation Board to representative them on the Planning Commission. Mr. Hassler stated it would be extremely difficult to impose term limits on those appointed by Council when there are no term limits for members appointed to serve on other boards.

Councilmember Abbott stated Council has received a lot of applicants over the past two years. He stated he is hopeful that the trend continues because we now have a large pool from which to appoint our members. He stated that may not be the case in future years.

Law Director Clemmons noted that the Charter Review Commission reorganizes every two years which means a new Commission will be appointed in early 2010. Unless members of the current Commission are reappointed, the work of this Commission is finished and therefore, this issue cannot be tabled for consideration by some future Commission. Mr. Clemmons recommended that the Commission either make a motion to approve term limits; someone seconds the motion and when a vote is taken, the Commission votes against the issue or the Commission simply asked for a motion to approve it, no one makes the motion, and then the issue dies.

Bill Vidourek, Charter Review Commission member, stated he is against term limits for the reasons stated this evening. He stated there is a control mechanism already in place and therefore a Charter change is not warranted.

Chairman Miller asked if there is a motion to approve term limits for Fairfield's boards and commissions.

Hearing no motion, the issue of term limits is no longer under consideration by the Commission and the work of the 2008-2009 Charter Review Commission concludes.

Adjournment

Jerry Keller, seconded by Bill Vidourek, moved for adjournment at 6:09 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dena Morsch
Recording Secretary