

Palmetto City Council
November 3, 2003 4:00 P.M.

Elected Officials Present:

Larry Bustle, Mayor
Shirley Groover Bryant, Vice Mayor
Tamara Cornwell, Council Member
Charlie Grace, Council Member
Mary Lancaster, Council Member
Brian Williams, Council Member

Staff and Others Present:

Jim Free, City Clerk
Chief Garry Lowe, Palmetto Police Department
Chris Lukowiak, Public Works Director
Jessica McCann, City Planner
Alan H. Prather, City Attorney
Ron Witt, Chairman/Charter Review Committee
Members of the Charter Review Committee
Deanna Roberts, Administrative Assistant

Mayor Bustle called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Mayor Bustle gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: Brian Williams moved, Ms. Lancaster seconded and motion carried 5-0 to approve the November 3, 2003, 4:00 p.m. agenda.

2. CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

The meeting was turned over to Ron Witt, Chairman of the Charter Review Committee. Mr. Witt gave a PowerPoint presentation to Council outlining the committee's suggested changes to the city charter and asking for Council's direction following this meeting.

Mr. Witt said the present charter has served the city well, but there seemed to be consensus among elected officials and citizens that it was time to revise the charter. The committee evaluated the present charter as charged by Resolution 03-03 and brings this report to Council for review and future direction for the committee.

Thanked all members of the committee and Mr. Stansbury for his invaluable guidance to the committee.

The top two priorities identified by the committee were the clarification of the roles of Mayor and Council and procedures for appointment, renewal or termination of department heads. And, the committee recommends a Balanced Mayor-Commission form of government.

Mr. Witt summarized the five suggested charter changes. They are:

1. Change City Council to City Commission and refer to members as commissioners.
2. Remove the Mayor's vote.
3. Increase the term of office for Mayor and Council to four years.
4. Modify city government to Balanced Mayor-Commission.
5. Add Charter Review procedures to the charter.

The committee also included non-charter recommendations for Council. They were: Consider the Mayor's position full time and promote greater public participation.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mrs. Lancaster expressed concern that removing the Mayor's vote would make it possible for any Mayor to lobby Council for his/her own agenda. Mr. Witt said Council Members still votes the way they see fit; still the legislative body.

Ms. Cornwell asked how increasing the terms of office would be phased in. Mr. Witt said that has not been addressed. It will need input from the City Attorney.

Mr. Witt described the Balanced Mayor-Commission form of government as the heart and soul of the committee's review as both branches of government, legislative and executive, are equally important. It is important to define the functions of each branch.

Mrs. Lancaster thinks the 3/5 vote for a department head will make it possible for two members to block legislation that benefits a particular ward. Mr. Witt said even though council members are elected from a certain ward, they still represent all citizens of Palmetto. Mr. Williams made the point that if a council member, acting through the Mayor via the Council, is not able to effect legislation for a particular ward, that member is essentially ineffective and would be replaced by the voters of that ward.

Regarding a full time Mayor, Mrs. Lancaster wanted to know if that involved full time pay. Also, if the Mayor is full time, he/she should be available in the office on a full time basis.

Mr. Williams said requiring a full time Mayor would eliminate others who may have something to offer the city. He said County Commissioners in many cases have other jobs. Mr. Witt said this is a non-charter recommendation, but a full time Mayor would simulate a City Manager and would make the transition easier financially for the city when the time comes. Mr. Williams wanted to know what qualifications would be required for a Mayor. Based on the report, he sees a contradiction and wants to know why the city can't just go ahead and go to a City Manager if

you're looking for full time and qualifications. Mr. Witt didn't think the package for a full time Mayor would be the same as for a City Manager.

Ms. Bryant said if Palmetto had a City Manager, the hiring and termination of department heads wouldn't be handled in a public environment; the City Manager would do that. The City Manager could be staff that's already in place so it wouldn't be a totally separate person and therefore not that much more money. She thinks a City Manager may not be as costly as stated and a City Manager would have to have qualifications and experience particularly in dealing with personnel issues. Ms. Bryant feels the city can't afford not to go to a City Manager form of government. It would alleviate a lot of the problems that now exist.

Mr. Witt said a City Manager is beholden to no one except Council and the role of Mayor is essentially dissolved. A City Manager is not a strong voice/face for the community. A Mayor elected by the citizens, accountable to the community, can fulfill that role.

Mr. Williams: What's going to change in a few years; what will be so different from now, that we couldn't go ahead and go to a City Manager form of government? A City Manger might correct the recent experiences that have taken place in the City.

Mr. Witt said the committee felt that financially and philosophically Palmetto wasn't ready for a City Manager. Ultimately, the citizens will have to make that decision.

Alan Prather said the charter could make a City Manager a possibility without implementing now. It can be there until Council passes an ordinance to establish the position.

Regarding a non charter recommendation to televise council meetings, Mr. Williams said he would rather put that money towards a City Manager and Ms. Bryant said in a previous survey citizens said they wouldn't want to spend money to do that. She commented it may be time for another survey.

Mr. Witt asked Council to allow the committee to continue working and meet with the attorney to draft a proposed charter. What does Council see as the next step in the process? Mr. Williams thinks the task is not done; the committee needs to bring back a charter. There are other things he would like to see the committee address: veto powers, City Manager (at least two members have expressed a preference for a City Manager and he wants Council and committee to agree), changing meeting dates and how long you have to live in the City to run for Council.

Mr. Witt asked for permission to continue with the services of Jim Stansbury.

Mr. Brunner asked to speak. He said the committee has reviewed the entire charter. He requested the Council have dialogue and vote up or down on the five recommendations. The committee did discuss the City Manager and it is not a recommendation of this committee. The suggested changes may make government more efficient and the city may or may not then need to move towards a City Manager in the future.

Mayor Bustle said he thought Council should make it clear to the committee that we want the committee to proceed with the charge in the resolution and continue its dialogue with the city attorney. Also, recommended proceeding with Mr. Stansbury.

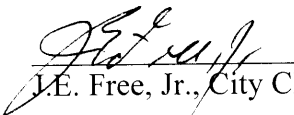
Ms. Cornwell thought first there must be another workshop for council to discuss how it feels about the suggested changes before paying the attorney to proceed with the draft language and Mr. Stansbury to facilitate meetings. Ms. Lancaster agreed with Mr. Brunner's recommendation for a vote on each suggested change saying there was no need to pay the attorney to bring back a document that will be rejected. Mr. Brunner said after the review Council should direct the committee on how to proceed, so it can bring back a document the Council is looking forward to. Mayor Bustle suggested the November 17, 4:00 p.m. meeting for a Council workshop.

Mr. Prather said a charter must be adopted by ordinance so there must be at least one public hearing. After council adopts the ordinance, under a ballot question, it is submitted to the electorate.

Mayor Bustle said the committee will remain in place and be available to take council recommendations to the attorney for draft language. A workshop will convene on November 17, at 4:00 p.m. Mayor Bustle said this is a high priority. Thanked Charter Review Committee members for all their work.

Meeting adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Minutes Approved: November 17, 2003


L.E. Free, Jr., City Clerk