

WESTCHESTER COUNTY REVISION COMMISSION

MINUTES

DECEMBER 20, 2012

Members in Attendance: Richard Wishnie, Jeff Binder, Alfred Gatta, Herman Geist, Julie Killian, Derickson Lawrence, John Mattis, Steve Mayo, Paul Meissner, Jane Morgenstern, Vincenza Restiano, Matthew Thomas, Paul Windels

Absent Members: Raymond Belair, Anne McAndrews, Florence McCue, David Menken, Gun Parisi, Bertrand Sellier, Ronald Volino, Gary Zuckerman, Sam Zerka

County Staff in Attendance: Stacey Dolgin-Kmetz, Chris Crane, Melanie Montalto

Commission Counsel: Lester Steinman

MINUTES

Chairman Wishnie called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Chairman Wishnie stated that approving the minutes from prior minutes would be deferred until a later meeting when they had a quorum. He went on to discuss the agenda for the night which included reports from the focus groups, their findings and in what direction they would take things.

Mr. Gatta discussed the items that will be included in the Executive-Legislative Focus Group Report at length with the commission. The five issues their focus group kept coming across were condensed into a report by Mr. Zuckerman.

The first issue was regarding the actual structure of the County Government in an attempt to make things more efficient and try and smooth relations between various branches of government. Mr. Gatta went on to discuss the various ideas regarding proposed changes to the County Government. The second issue was the assessment function. The people the focus group interviewed had very mixed reviews regarding the current procedure. Mr. Gatta discussed the group's recommendations. He stated that the last time a County-Wide Reevaluation occurred was in 2011 and that the tax certioraris equaled around \$55 million. The Commission mentioned concerns about possible costs for litigation and other issues with this at length. The third issue was regarding the position of County Clerk, suggesting that it be changed to an appointed position in contrast to it presently being an elected position. Mr. Gatta said the fourth area of concern is that since 1937 there have been only two charter review commissions. He stated that a standing commission at the direction of the County Executive and Board of Legislators may be better. The last issue was the problems with the current appointment process, and the recent problems that have arisen.

Mr. Binder discussed the five issues that the Budget & Finance Focus Group is looking at for their report. He stated that the first one is the timing of the fiscal year and possibly moving the fiscal year to match that of the state which starts on July 1st. Mr. Binder said that the second suggestion may be to extend the time period from the time the County Executive releases the budget to the Legislature, and the date that it is required to be completed, as it is a short time to properly review such a large budget. The third item they are considering is to require quarterly reports of the budget. He stated another item may be looking at who has access to departmental funding requests and clarifying it in the charter. Mr. Binder stated that they may also include the creation of an independent budget office stating the problem of the Budget Director having loyalty to both branches of government.

Mr. Steinman provided the issues that are currently included in the Charter & Codes Focus Group Report draft. Mr. Steinman stated that the current issues being looked at by the group included the role of the County Attorney, specifically discussing issues of conflict of interest and separate representation for the Board. The second item which, Mr. Steinman noted, he has not been privy to is concerning the establishment of a parks district. The third item related to one of the issues Mr. Gatta brought up regarding the clarification of the confirmation process. Another issue was the terms of the County-Wide reassessment. Finally several issues stemming from the findings of the 1988 Charter Review Commission included updating provisions of the County Tax Law, the County appointments Law, and recognizing the function of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation as an oversight committee for Playland.

Mr. Steinman provided the issues that the Local Government-County government Focus group has been looking at included: creating a separate office for intergovernmental relations, formalizing the current Council of Governments by including language in the Charter, along with shared services, specifically mentioning shared law enforcement offices, an office to work directly with local governments for administrative purposes, and finally the mandate for local guarantee of county taxes.

Mr. Steinman briefly discussed the overall focus and direction of the focus groups in relation to the goals of the Charter Revision Commission as a whole.

Mr. Geist asked if any of the focus groups have considered the compensation of elected officials. Mr. Geist stated that every 2 years, an independent panel should create the salary requirements and provisions for legislators. A discussion ensued regarding responsibilities of the focus groups. Mr. Binder stated the need for the Commission to bring in people outside of government to provide input.

A commission member noted certain redundancies between the focus groups, such as the County-Wide reassessment. Two years ago, it was put before the governor who vetoed it. Mr. Binder noted that County-Wide re-evaluation was different in establishing protocol from County-Wide Reassessment. They discussed the various impacts that would occur from these changes.

Chairman Wishnie stated that the next meeting will be on January 10th, 2013.

With a motion by Mr. Gatta seconded by Mr. Thomas the Charter Revision Commission adjourned at 7:50 pm.