

City of Sandy Springs Charter Commission was held on Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 6:01 p.m., Chair Gabe Sterling presiding.

**I. Call to Order**

**Chairperson Gabriel Sterling** called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

**II. Roll Call**

City Clerk Raquel Gonzalez called the roll.

**Members Present:** Tochie Alford Blad, Chip Collins, Tricia Gephardt, Melody Kelley, Tom Mahaffey, Suleima Millan-Salinas, Sunny Park, Andrea Settles, Ronda Smith, Gabriel Sterling.

**Guest(s) Present:** Oliver Porter

**Staff Present:** Assistant to the City Manager Samantha Dulac, Staff Attorney Caleb Saggus, City Clerk Raquel D. Gonzalez

**III. Ruling on a Quorum**

City Clerk Raquel Gonzalez confirmed a quorum of members was present.

**IV. Approval of Meeting Agenda**

**Motion and Vote.** A motion was made by Member Andrea Settles, seconded by Member Tom Mahaffey, to approve the meeting agenda. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

**V Approval of Meeting Minutes** - February 4, 2021 Charter Review Commission Meeting Minutes

**Motion and Second.** A motion was made by Member Andrea Settles, seconded by Member Ronda Smith, to approve the February 4, 2021 Charter Review Commission meeting minutes.

**Member Tochie Blad** asked if more detailed minutes would be available in the future.

**Chair Gabriel Sterling** replied that can be discussed. The presented minutes are action minutes. The goal is to make all meeting recordings available so that if someone needs further clarification then they can view the video.

**Vote on the Motion.** The motion carried by unanimous vote.

**VI New Business**

**A. CRC2021-04** 2011 Charter Review Commission Discussion

**Guest Oliver Porter** answered questions about the 2011 Charter Review Commission. Recommendations by the Charter Review Commission go to City Council, they either approve or edit, and then they send it on to the Legislature. The Legislature can then approve or edit. The big issues before the Commission then were basically term limits and salaries; which were presented to the Legislature. Which they, in turn, rejected. In the Review, there was not a lot that needed to be changed, as it was reviewed in great detail. Both previous Commissions, the original Charter

Commission and the Review, recommended term limits and in both cases the Legislature declined. Politicians do not like term limits. Specifically, there are two elements to term limits; one, is the length of term and the other is whether to be staggered or not. There was a great deal of discussion and they ended up recommending changes and the Legislature rejected that recommendation.

**Chair Gabriel Sterling** stated one other unique thing in the Charter is everybody runs at once. If you put term limits in, you are guaranteed a new set of people every single time and there is no retention of continuity from one administration to the next. When there are no terms limits, the retention of continuity has been naturally occurring. This is going to be one of the things that will be discussed. Not having terms limits also saves the City upwards of \$400K for not having all the extra elections.

**Vice Chair Tochie Blad** asked about the millage rate cap. Most Georgia cities set their own millage rates annually based on budgetary needs. It usually fluctuates up and/or down as items become necessary in the budget.

**Mr. Porter** replied the most relevant thing behind that particular language was that the word was out that we were going to massively increase taxes when we formed the City; so, it was important to put a 'stake in the ground' for the public to know this was not the intent. The only way you could really do that was to write it into the Charter. Secondly, it was felt that the set millage rate was plenty; the rate itself was what we were being charged as a Special Service District by the county.

**Chair Sterling** stated this is not a permanent cap. It can be raised if it goes to the vote of citizens of Sandy Springs. One of the arguments was that it will make it harder to raise taxes. It would be a great to have this presented to the Commission by the City Manager or the Finance Director.

**Member Ronda Smith** commented on the other primary option, with respect to Salaries, in the provision in Section 2.07 about the Council's authority to vote annually to raise the Mayor and City Council members' salaries and the amounts consistent with CPI. If there is a provision that allows that compensation to increase, why hasn't it been exercised?

**Mr. Porter** replied the intention for the lower rates was they didn't want someone to take this job as a profession, they wanted to attract volunteers who were civic minded; we have received good quality people, who accept the nominal salary.

**Vice Chair Blad** asked did the 2011 Commission consider changing from the 6 Council Districts. Were at-large elections ever considered for districts, and what was the thinking behind the 6 districts?

**Mr. Porter** replied the intention was that each Council member was to represent their district but more so, the City as a whole. One of the possible changes you could make, which was discussed previously, is to have at-large voting so they Council member would be representing the entire city but also be available in their districts to the people they represented. There was another option that was put forward, to have fewer districts and then have 2 at-large, i.e., 5 districts with 2 at-large.

**Chair Sterling** stated this has worked well because it allows a Council member to focus on their one area and deal with constituent issues that way; whereas at-large, constituent issues can overwhelm them from doing all else. Also, if you look at turnout models, District 3 always has a lot more people

voting. If we did that, it might be that District 3 would get all their priorities as the biggest because of the most votes. As for now, you have Council members prioritizing things in every one of the districts. We have been very well served by the people who have been elected so far.

**Member Melody Kelley** asked for clarification on why the rationale for not staggering City Council member elections.

**Mr. Porter** replied that it was decided that at the time of deciding on the election, two years was too soon and six years was too long, so let everyone run for four years, and see how that works. Another argument was that if you had elections every two years, all of a sudden nearly every other year becomes people posturing versus four years. It was discussed that if they are all up for election and are not elected, then something is quite wrong and they would need to change.

**Member Kelley** asked how was the oath created? Also, did the possibility of plurality votes for Council districts ever come up in any discussions? Finally, no one came to the meetings during the 2011 Charter Review. Do you think there was anything that could have been done to entice folks to attend? Was there any reason for lack of participation?

**Mr. Porter** replied he had written the oath and designed the City seal. As to plurality votes question any discussion was done in passing; everyone was basically of the view that a majority should be required. We did have a few people who came and commented; but, there was no great public outcry to attend. Fifteen years ago, we were struggling to get an email mailing list. During the 2011 Review, we simply relied on the media to report our findings and they were presented to the Council in a Mayor / City Council Meeting, there would have been full opportunity for folks to come and comment, too.

**Member Suleima Millan-Salinas** asked if in this 2011 Charter Review was there ever a discussion of translating the Charter into Spanish, since Sandy Springs does have a fairly large Spanish speaking population.

**Chair Sterling** stated that during the campaign for establishing the City, all materials were translated into Spanish. It would be a very good idea to get this into Spanish given our rise in Spanish population.

#### **B. CRC2021-05 Public Comment on Current Charter**

**City Clerk Raquel Gonzalez** confirmed only one public comment card was received, and was published with the meeting agenda. It was also distributed to members of the Commission in advance of the meeting.

### **VII. Other Business**

#### **A. CRC2021-06 Organizational Discussion**

##### **1. Charter Review Commission Webpage**

**Chair Gabriel Sterling** stated the City will create a webpage for the Charter Review Commission that will include: meeting dates, times, agendas and recordings; a link to the City Charter; and other information.

2. **Public Comment**

**Consensus of Commission Members:** When meeting virtually, accommodations will be made at future meetings to allow public comment to be made in person at City Hall.

Accommodations will also be made to allow public comment by chat. Public Comment cards will be used. Live public comment will be limited to three minutes, unless the Commission decides to extend time.

3. **Subcommittees**

**Consensus of Commission Members:** Members will research topics of interest and present to the body during meetings. Members will review meeting minutes and final reports from the previous Charter Review Commission.

4. **Future Meetings**

**Motion and Vote:** A motion was made by Member Melody Kelley, seconded by Member Tricia Gephardt, to approve the following meeting Charter Review Commission meeting schedule: April 1, 2021; April 15, 2021; May 6, 202; June 3, 2021; and July 1, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

**VIII. Adjournment**

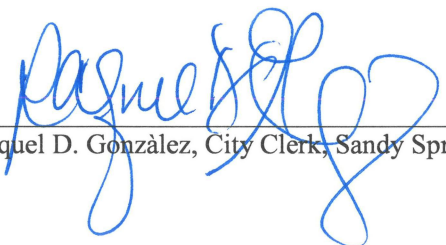
**Motion and Vote:** A motion was made by Member Tricia Gephardt, seconded by Member Tochie Alford Blad, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Date Approved: April 1, 2021



Gabriel Sterling, Chairperson

  
Raquel D. Gonzalez, City Clerk, Sandy Springs