

Ramsey County Charter Commission
Monday, August 2, 2010

The Ramsey County Charter Commission meeting, held at the Association of Minnesota Counties Building, 125 Charles Avenue, St. Paul, MN, was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Peter Hendricks, with the following members present:

MEMBERS PRESENT:

District 1: Bob Weisenburger
District 2: Bob Benke
District 2: Richard Moses
District 3: Bryan Olson
District 3: Frank Gurney
District 4: Peter Hendricks
Chris Leifeld
District 5: Rod Halvorson
District 6: Russ Miller
District 7: Bud Berry
At-Large: Minoka Kitto

MEMBERS ABSENT:

District 1: Jim Schottmuller (excused)
District 5: Lyle Nelson (excused)
District 6: A.L. Brown (excused)
District 7: Marv Koppen (excused)
At-Large: Mike Fratto (excused)
Beth Miller (excused)

Also present: Jim McDonough, Commissioner, District 6; Darwin Lookingbill, County Attorney's Office; and Bonnie Jackelen, County Manager's Office.

APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 2, 2010 AGENDA

Upon duly made motion, the Agenda of August 2, 2010 was approved.

APPROVAL OF THE MAY 3, 2010 MINUTES

Upon duly made motion, the Minutes of the May 3, 2010 meeting were approved.

CITIZEN COMMENTS/INPUT

None.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Jim McDonough spoke of the County's two-year budget; 2010 is the second year of the current two-year budget and is basically comprised of critical success indicators and performance measures/outcomes. Ramsey County has been doing outcome based budgeting and evidence based services so that the money spent comes with some assurances that the County is actually getting results. Some adjustments and changes are made to the dollar amount of the budget. There is no change in the property tax levy, which is an increase of 2.7%. One adjustment in the budget pertains to management and maintenance of the Emerald Ash Borer disease. Another adjustment pertains to County Program Aid. Last year it was expected the County would lose \$4 million in County Program Aid, state dollars that go to counties to help fund local programs mandated by the state, much of which is in the human services area. This money was reinstated by the state. However, it was not put back into the budget because with the current budget problem of \$5-7 billion, that \$4 million may again be taken away. The County Manager has proposed to put that money into a fund to pay for future liabilities incurred for employee benefits. There is currently \$30 million in that

fund, typically made up of one-time dollars. If the County does not lose the \$4 million, it will go there; if the state takes it away again it does not contribute to a budget crisis.

There are three ways the state provides dollars to counties: County Program Aid; programmatic aid which would be for a special program or service; and market value credit, which is designed to be a direct aid to property owners. The market value credit was cut by \$5.1 million, a one-time cut, which was the first time that credit has been cut. The County Manager has proposed that because it is supposedly a one-time cut, all departments in the County will make up the \$5.1 million within their budgets.

Mr. Benke asked for an example of performance measures. Commissioner McDonough provided an example of a survey done within the Parks and Recreation Department whereby 97% of park users are pleased with the system.

Mr. Miller asked about the underfunding of the pension fund. Commissioner McDonough said that currently about \$17 million is budgeted annually for retiree benefits. Over the years actions have been taken to minimize the impact of retiree benefits on the County's budget. In 1990, the County Board made significant changes to retiree health benefits. Changes have also been made in benefits for new hires. Actuaries have projected a future liability to Ramsey County of \$270 million. If the County was to budget on a pay-as-you-go basis the day would come where \$45 million would have to be budgeted annually to deal with the promised benefits. The liability is manageable; the County just needs to be proactive about funding. About six years ago, the Board eliminated promised benefits to new hires and instead set up a health care savings plan.

Mr. Moses asked for the percentage of the welfare budget that goes to undocumented aliens. Commissioner McDonough was unable to provide that information.

Mr. Moses asked about the 1/4% sales tax for transit. Commissioner McDonough said the legislature gave the seven metro counties authority to add 1/4% for transit. Each county board had to approve that tax; five of the seven counties approved it – Scott and Carver Counties chose not to do so. The money is pooled and about 30% goes to capital costs of transit projects and 50% is for the operation gaps.

Mr. Moses asked if there is a cost benefit summary on light rail transit. Commissioner McDonough said there are different ways to view cost/benefit. Roads are highly subsidized. By constitution, one of the roles government is to deal with is transportation and transit.

Mr. Hendricks asked if Commissioner McDonough had any suggestions for changes to the Ramsey County Home Rule Charter. Commissioner McDonough said he is proud to be associated with the only home rule charter county in the State of Minnesota. He believes the role of the Charter Commission is a high level commission, as the majority of the work was done by the initial Charter Commission; there is not a lot of work left to be done by future Commissions. It is necessary to revisit and fine-tune the document and to add new authorities such as design/build that had been done several years ago. He believes the Charter was not designed to micromanage the County. Elected officials are accountable to the people who elect them. The management of policy at the County level should be managed by the County Board, not the Charter Commission. Changes to the Charter

should not be reactionary to a particular situation. Work done by the Charter Commission is valuable to the County and the dialogue between the County Board and the Charter Commission should never get in the way of the Charter Commission and where they want to go with it, but it is important to have dialogue and conversation about input to changes.

Mr. Benke asked about the salary issue that the Charter Commission had been studying. Commissioner McDonough said the salary issue is a big deal; he does not like voting on his own salary. However, he believes that going to the citizens with a formula is too prescriptive and leaves no flexibility for the future.

Mr. Benke asked for the total County budget amount. Commissioner McDonough said it is almost \$600 million.

Mr. Moses asked about the LEED certification for the Roseville Library. Commissioner McDonough believes there are many good things about a LEED certification but he voted against the LEED certification at the Roseville Library because he did not support spending \$600,000 of property tax levy just to place a certificate on the wall. Union Depot will also have a LEED certificate.

Mr. Hendricks asked about redistricting. Commissioner McDonough said redistricting will take place in 2012. After each census, changes need to be made to boundaries so that each Commissioner District has a relatively equal number of citizens. If the changes in boundaries result in more than 5% of people who did not get a chance to vote for the sitting Commissioner in the previous election, a new election would need to take place.

Mr. Halvorson asked if redistricting would be done in time for the 2012 election or if the new election would take place in 2014. Commissioner McDonough said redistricting would be done prior to filing for the 2012 elections.

Mr. Halvorson said the character of the neighborhood, current boundaries, etc. should be taken into consideration so there are distinguishing boundaries rather than going down to the exact number of people. Commissioner McDonough said a precinct cannot be split. Mr. Lookingbill said boundaries are to be withdrawn as close as practicable, so that the variances between Districts are within 1-2%.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the Charter Commissioner will be Monday, November 8, 2010, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The date had previously been changed to avoid holding a meeting the night before elections. The location has yet to be determined.

EXPIRING TERMS – NEXT AGENDA

Frank Guerney and Minoka Kitto have both served two terms on the Charter Commission; their current terms end November 2010. The Commission thanked them for their service. Mr. Hendricks said elections for 2011 officers will be placed on the next agenda. Chris Leifeld is serving as the Nominating Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair Hendricks declared the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

