

**Ramsey County Charter Commission**  
**Monday, November 8, 2010**

The Ramsey County Charter Commission meeting, held at the Ramsey County Public Works Facility, 1425 Paul Kirkwood Drive, Arden Hills, MN, was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Peter Hendricks, with the following members present:

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

District 1: Richard Sonterre  
District 2: Bob Benke  
District 2: Richard Moses  
District 3: Bryan Olson  
District 4: Peter Hendricks  
District 4: Chris Leifeld  
District 5: Rod Halvorson  
District 6: Russ Miller  
District 7: Bud Berry  
At-Large: Mike Fratto  
Fred Perez

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

District 1: Bob Weisenburger (excused)  
  
District 3: VACANT  
  
District 5: Robert Spaulding (excused)  
District 6: A.L. Brown  
District 7: Marv Koppen (excused)  
At-Large: Beverly Aplikowski (excused)

Also present: Tony Bennett, Commissioner, District 1; Darwin Lookingbill, County Attorney's Office; and Bonnie Jackelen, County Manager's Office.  
Citizens present: Lyle Nelson, Greg Copeland

**CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION**

Certificates of appreciation were created for all outgoing members. Lyle Nelson was the only former member in attendance. The others will be mailed their certificate.

**APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 8, 2010 AGENDA**

Upon duly made motion, the Agenda of November 8, 2010 was approved.

**APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 2, 2010 MINUTES**

Upon duly made motion, the Minutes of the August 2, 2010 meeting were approved.

**CITIZEN COMMENTS/INPUT**

Greg Copeland suggested that future Charter Commission meetings be held in a facility that is wired for television. People would likely have more interest and knowledge if the meetings were available on the public cable system. Perhaps this Commission could suggest to the County Commissioners and other Boards that their meetings be held in a facility that is accessible electronically. A sizeable investment has been made in City Hall Court House in those systems. It seems foolish to meet in a room that does not have those capabilities and does not offer the citizens an opportunity to observe this work. The County Commissioners meet in that facility and people know what the Board is doing if they choose to know.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Commissioner Update**

Commissioner Tony Bennett addressed the previous comments from Mr. Copeland. He said people with Dish TV or Direct TV are unable to get any cable broadcasting. He believes tonight's meeting room, the large conference room in the Public Works facility, is cable ready.

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Commissioner Bennett said a second Public Hearing on the 2011 budget will be held Monday, November 29, 2010, beginning at 6:30 p.m., at the Roseville Area High School. The budget will be adopted on December 14, 2010.

Mr. Moses asked what the maximum budget is. Commissioner Bennett said the budget is approximately \$590 million and the increase for 2011 will be approximately 2.7% on the levy with a 1.3% increase in spending. Most of that increase is due to health care costs and contractual labor contracts.

Mr. Moses agreed with everything Mr. Copeland said about televising meetings.

Mr. Benke said New Brighton held a similar discussion about televising meetings when the Council decided that all Board and Commission meetings be televised; then they decided not to televise them all. Most of the council tables are too small to accommodate this group. It is difficult to find a location that is large enough to accommodate this entire group. The size of this group somewhat limits the opportunity to find a location that can easily and inexpensively do cable casting.

Mr. Sonterre said that meetings could be recorded in a facility and then re-broadcast across a multitude of different cable companies.

Mr. Hendricks referred to the timing of the County Board Meetings and asked if there is any talk of changing the time from Tuesday mornings. Commissioner Bennett said that some Public Hearings, such as the one coming up in Roseville, are held in the evening. The County Board has met on Tuesday mornings for many years, and holds many workshops on Tuesday afternoons.

Mr. Halvorson asked Commissioner Bennett if he was aware of any issues that the Charter Commission should consider to amend the Home Rule Charter that would improve the efficiency and organization of the County government. Commissioner Bennett said he would give some thought to that question.

Mr. Olson said that everyone is linked with Comcast; the essence of his question has always been about televising the meetings. There has been the ability to make the connection so that all three of the cable access facilities could be connected within the County which would allow sending of emergency messages, have meetings throughout the County, such as the Charter Commission about the Sheriff question. Those should have been telecast throughout the County live and we would have had more response. He asked if the County Board could investigate the issue. Because of an agreement with the City of St. Paul, the County Board should have some input toward convincing SPNN, the City of St. Paul and possibly Comcast.

Mr. Benke asked if the County Board meetings are televised. Ms. Jackelen responded affirmatively and said the connection is somehow linked to the other systems. She is not certain if the meetings are telecast live to every point within the County, but they are re-broadcast.

Mr. Olson said that by the time the signal from the County Board meetings gets to Roseville and White Bear Lake the quality is very poor. Ms. Jackelen said the City of St. Paul has distributed a Request for Proposals for re-working the cables, monitors, and the control room to be done in 2011.

*(Continued)*

Mr. Olson said there is an issue that SPNN is not connected in the fiber optic ring with all the other facilities. If that connection was made it would improve the quality of all meetings coming out of the Court House to the suburbs because they would be getting a direct signal from the Court House rather than the round-about route through Comcast through the City of St. Paul then up to the suburbs. Roseville CTV gets it first and then re-transmits it to White Bear Lake. This is all because SPNN is not connected to the ring. Why isn't SPNN connected to the ring when this could be done for a small amount of money – between \$5,000 and \$10,000? He would like to see the County Board put some leverage on the City to get this done so there can be a countywide connection.

Mr. Sonterre said that if this is an issue for further discussion it could be placed on an agenda and he knows a couple of folks that could come discuss it further.

Mr. Moses brought up the issue of Commissioners' salaries. He asked that the Commissioners set a limit of 5% per year as a matter of integrity. Commissioner Bennett said there have been two separate methods used, once of which were cost of living increases, which lasted a couple of years. Another method is to increase Commissioners' salaries by the same rate provided to employees, just a year behind. Commissioner Bennett said the Board would like not having to set its salary.

Mr. Hendricks asked why there was no public discussion among Commissioners on the salary issue. He provided input at a public hearing, along with a couple of other people, and two weeks later the Board voted on the issue, with no discussion. He spent lots of time preparing his remarks and the Board did not acknowledge the fact that the public spoke on the issue. Commissioner Bennett said it was probably because they were at the same level as had been given to employees.

Mr. Benke said that if the Board had a formula tied to what is given to union employees are they going to be accused of being "sweethearts" with the unions. One way to do it might be to look at comparable county boards. He doesn't have any answers, but sympathizes with the Board. Commissioner Bennett said Ramsey County sets the pace in that the Board must set its salary by July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. Most begin the salary process after the elections are over.

Mr. Hendricks said Ramsey County is unique because the salary is set by ordinance. If the people want to bring a referendum they can do so. They now have 45 days to gather the signatures.

Mr. Halvorson asked if there is anything that could be done in the Charter that says whether the Sheriff and County Attorney are elected or not, he/she could not ever appeal or sue on budget issues. The Board is responsible for setting the budget even if the County Attorney and Sheriff disagree. Commissioner Bennett said there are two statutes on the books – both of which allow the Sheriff and County Attorney to appeal. One is if that they need to ask for their salary each year. The second one has to do with their budget. He believes that would need to be changed in State Statute. Mr. Lookingbill said he would have to look into that issue.

Commissioner Bennett said the Sheriff's duties and responsibilities are set by State Statute, such as housing of prisoners, waterways, civil warrants. Mr. Lookingbill said the budget appeal right is common for every elected office such as auditor, treasurer, etc. Ramsey County doesn't have elected offices other than Commissioners, Sheriff and County Attorney. Mr. Lookingbill will research whether or not there is any way the Charter could be revised to address this.

*(Continued)*

Mr. Moses asked Commissioner Bennett about a recent trip to Reno, Nevada. Commissioner Bennett said he attended a seminar as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Counties (NACo), on which he additionally serves as Vice-Chair of the Justice and Public Safety Committee. If he travels on County business his expenses are paid by the County; in this case he traveled to the Board Meeting under the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) which paid his expenses. Mr. Moses asked where AMC gets its money. Commissioner Bennett said it gets a good share of its money through its insurance company and some through dues paid by the counties, and another one or two areas.

Mr. Moses asked about travel in general; in 2008 there was about \$7,000 per Commissioner for travel expenses. Commissioner Bennett said travel is challenging; frequent flyer miles are tracked; and the County is stringent in reporting. All travel paid by the county must be related to County government.

Mr. Miller asked if travel expenses are allocated individually on an annual basis. Commissioner Bennett responded affirmatively.

Mr. Fratto said he finds this line of questioning out of order; if someone is interested in County travel regulations, he/she could go to the County to check it. It is not the role of the Charter Commission to question a Commissioner about his/her travel. The Charter Commission's role is to deal with issues related to the Charter. We invite Commissioners to attend the meeting to talk about issues related to the County; the questions just asked relate to the personnel policies of the County, but the Charter Commission has no control over them. He feels his time is being wasted by asking questions that could be done directly through the Commissioner or the personnel office. This is not the first time these types of questions have come up. If someone is interested in issues related to the politics of the elected position, deal with it related to the politics of it outside this Commission. He finds this to be a waste of his time and he doesn't need to be here to have individuals deal with these issues. We get close enough to politics on some of the issues we discuss. Let's try to stay away from the personal aspect of it.

Mr. Sonterre said the only note he has written pertains to "what is the role of the Charter Commission". Mr. Fratto articulated his concern that this was turning into a series of personal political interrogations. He is not saying they are not worthy, but in his perspective, not appropriate. This is not germane to the role of the Charter Commission. It has been 45 minutes since the topic of 'new business' began.

Mr. Hendricks thanked Commissioner Bennett for attending the meeting.

#### Election of 2011 Officers

Mr. Leifeld and Mr. Benke reported that the Committee is nominating Peter Hendricks as Chair, and nominating Bob Benke as Vice-Chair of the Charter Commission for 2011. Mr. Hendricks and Mr. Benke accepted the nomination. The committee report stands as a motion and second.

Mr. Moses nominated Bryan Olson as Chair. The nomination was seconded. Mr. Olson declined the nomination.

Mr. Olson nominated Richard Sonterre as Chair. Mr. Moses seconded the nomination. Mr. Sonterre accepted the nomination.

*(Continued)*

Mr. Halvorson moved, seconded by Mr. Benke, to close the nominations. Unanimously approved.

Roll Call vote on 2011 Chair:

Hendricks – Leifeld, Perez, Benke, Halvorson, Miller – 5.

Sonterre – Sonterre, Berry, Moses, Olson, Fratto, Hendricks – 6.

Richard Sonterre was elected Chair for 2011.

Mr. Hendricks called for additional nominations for the position of Vice-Chair. Hearing none, Mr. Halvorson moved, seconded by Mr. Fratto, to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Mr. Benke. Unanimously approved.

### **2011 MEETING DATES**

Mr. Benke noted that the November 7<sup>th</sup> meeting date is the night before elections. Mr. Benke moved, seconded by Mr. Fratto, to change the November meeting date to November 14<sup>th</sup> and to accept all other meeting dates as proposed: February 7, May 2, August 1 and November 14, 2011. Unanimously approved.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Benke brought up the outcome of the Charter Commission questions on the ballot. The first question failed by 70% and the second question passed.

#### COUNTY QUESTION 1

YES	NO
48234	114046

#### COUNTY QUESTION 2

YES	NO
95766	66505

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Hendricks declared the meeting adjourned.

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Bonnie C. Jackelen, Chief Clerk – County Board