

Ramsey County Charter Commission – Work Session
Monday, February 6, 2012

The Ramsey County Charter Commission held a work session at the Ramsey County Court House, 15 W Kellogg Blvd, St. Paul, MN. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Bob Benke, with the following members present:

	<u>Members Present:</u>	<u>Members Absent:</u>
District 1:		Robert Weisenburger Richard Sonterre
District 2:	Richard Moses Bob Benke (Chair)	
District 3:	Bryan K. Olson Randy Gustafson	
District 4:	Christopher Leifeld Peter Hendricks	
District 5:	Rod Halvorson	
District 6:	Michael Fratto Russell Miller	
District 7:		Bud Berry Marvin Koppen
At Large:	A.L. Brown Beverly Aplikowski Fred Perez	

Also present: Kyle Thomas, Director, Civil Division, County Attorney's Office
Jeff Stephenson, Assistant County Attorney
Harry McPeak, Assistant County Attorney
Bonnie Jackelen, County Manager's Office
Megan Haugen, Elections Office

Old Business

County Commissioners' salary issue

Moses re-introduced the issue as the second go-around. He would like this to remain non partisan. Moses presented research regarding the CPI index for the metro area and possible language for the amendment. He would prefer that Option A be placed on the 2012 ballot as a Charter Amendment.

Fratto asked when Moses expected a referendum to be held- that is, when would a raise of more than 3% be on the ballot. He is not sure how we can implement this when there is not a countywide election every year. Moses said that after the Commissioners passed a salary increase the issue would be on the next general election ballot.

Hendricks said that the last time this issue was raised, a subcommittee discussed the issue, and public hearings were held. He stated that salary increases have to be passed by an Ordinance prior to July 1st in order to be effective January 1st of the following year.

Aplikowski asked how a referendum would get on the ballot if it is automatic and asked if it removed the 30 day wait time.

Fratto said that this would be placed on the ballot by the Elections Office the next time there was an election.

Aplikowski asked if this takes away the right for the Elections Manager to say that the question was or was not valid or could question the verbiage, or if there would be a waiting period before it could be placed on the ballot.

Fratto stated that this was not the petition process and that the Elections Manager could not question the wording. His concern is that there is not a county-wide vote every year.

Brown agrees that the process was a fair process. He does not believe that the Elections Director could veto a referendum question. He suggested that instead of 3% per year, it would be 6% over two years in order to accommodate county wide elections every two years.

Fratto suggested changing the language to say that the referendum would have to be on the next county general election.

Olson suggested the county board could do their raises on a biennial basis on the even year, and that perhaps the county commissioners should push up the July ordinance to May so that it can get on the ballot.

Fratto raised questions as to how the ballot question would work and how the timeline is structured.

Brown believes that once it is law, it then becomes an automatic ballot question if needed.

Fratto stated it shouldn't take more than 3 months to get the question on the ballot. He thinks that voting for an increase in July would not be a problem to get the referendum on the November ballot.

Benke stated that 6% would be difficult to approve, and that it would be easier to state 3% per annum.

Fratto believes the Commissioners would take 3% each and every year and never anything more.

Hendricks does not believe that elections does not have any review authority.

Aplikowski questioned that this is under the jurisdiction of the Charter Commission.

Hendricks stated that the Charter Commission is charged with changing the charter.

Benke asked how current salary increases get passed.

Hendricks stated the County Board is required through the Charter to pass a salary increase by an ordinance.

Fratto stated that most won't recognize the difference between automatic and petition. He stated the commission should pass it and have the County Attorney look at it and then vote on it at the May meeting.

Brown agrees with Benke that 3% per annum makes sense, and that there has never been a citizen led referendum that has succeeded.

Benke asked if the current Ramsey County Board compensation package is out of line with comparable county boards.

Moses stated the amount is not the topic of discussion, right now this would prevent a possible scandal. He believes sudden and huge increases are not what is wanted. He does not want to go down the road of debating the current compensation.

Brown stated that a salary study had been done. This is about putting controls in place. The salaries are in line, but there are variances in population between counties.

Fratto stated that you cannot compare Ramsey to Hennepin based on population. The fact that there is greater population does not mean that the work load is greater. He thinks that this is the way to go to solve future problems, and that the language needs to be palatable.

Aplikowski questioned what the magic was in 3%.

Fratto doesn't want to pass something that would prevent someone from running.

Miller asked if Commissioners' terms could be changed to a two year term, and if the Charter Commission could suggest that as an amendment.

Aplikowski would prefer 2% to 3%.

Moses complemented the tone of the discussion. He read a proposed ballot question to be placed on the 2012 ballot: *"Should the Ramsey County Home Rule Charter be amended so that a salary ordinance increasing Commissioner salaries by more than three percent (3%) per annum shall be subject to an automatic referendum?"* He would be willing to go to 2.5%, but said the Charter Commission should not get hung up on the specific percentage.

Fratto stated that the term "scandal" has been overused – there is no scandal now nor has there been one.

Moses was outraged at the previous 25% raise. He thinks that this is a good solution.

Brown believes that 2% per annum is fair, there is no magic in 3%. He questioned how "salary" is defined and if benefits are included.

Benke stated that the County Attorney ruled that health care coverage is compensation, not salary. He believes this is a good concern that is worth discussing.

Fratto stated that according to the Charter, per diems are not paid and benefits are not mentioned. He assumes that County Board already has the benefits that the rest of the county employees have.

Hendricks said that Ramsey County is the only County Board that is required to approve their salary increases through an ordinance process, and the ordinance process requires a public hearing. He stated that this is unique and that another layer such as a referendum is not needed.

Brown stated that the County Board should make more avenues for the public to come to County meetings; many cannot get to existing meetings.

Adjournment

Benke adjourned the meeting at 6:57 pm.