

**Whatcom County
Charter Review Commission**

Meeting Minutes

February 22, 1995

I. Call To Order by Chairperson Kathy Sutter

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Lynden Christian High School Library by chairperson Kathy Sutter.

II. Roll Call

Present:

Keith Ahrens
Danna Beech
Joe Elenbaas (arrived late)
Karen Frederick
Georgia Gardner (arrived late)
Don Hansey
Darlene McLeod
Ron Polinder
Ray Radke
Mary Scrimsher
Orphalee Smith (arrived late)
Mary Stender
Kathy Sutter
Terry Unger

Absent, but excused:

Yvonne Goldsmith

Elenbaas arrived at this point in the meeting.

III. Reading and Approval of Minutes from the February 15, 1995 Meeting

Recording secretary Kerstin M. Bailey read the minutes into the record.

Gardner and Smith arrived at this point in the meeting.

Ahrens moved to approve of the minutes as presented.

Radke seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Introduction of Commissioners and Overview of Charter Review Commission

Each of the Commissioners introduced themselves to the members of the public.

V. Open Session

The Chair opened the floor for open session.

Speakers:

Martin Van Buren, 623 E. Wiser Ridge, Lynden

Frank Winslow, 433 17th St., Bellingham

Richard Gilda, 2727 Jensen Rd., Bellingham

Bob Ewing, 9621 Harvey Rd., Blaine

Bill Geyer, 1008 16th Street, Bellingham

Jason Reimer

The Chair closed open session.

VI. Discussion of Article III - Focus: "Role of County Executive"

The Chair asked County Executive Shirley Van Zanten to discuss her role and the Home Rule Charter, and to answer questions.

The Chair called for a recess at 8:30 p.m.

At 8:40 p.m., the Chair reconvened the meeting.

County Executive Shirley Van Zanten continued responding to questions.

VII. Other Business

The Chair discussed a letter received from Council Member Barbara Brenner regarding a time conflict with the Council's Comprehensive Plan meetings.

Beech moved to skip next Wednesday night [Clerk's note: March 1, 1995] and make it up later on.

Elenbaas seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 13 - 1, with Unger opposed.

Bob Woods gave information and handouts to the Commissions, including "County Reorganization in America" and a listing of positions in County government. He has the minutes and information from the last Charter Review Commission.

The Chair proposed to send a response to Brenner's letter. With minor changes, the Commission agreed by consent.

The Chair asked for volunteers to write two opposing editorials for Dick Beardsley of the Herald, one editorial supporting the appointed manager, the other supporting the elected Executive.

The Commission decided by consent that, until the Manager/Executive discussion is finished, it is too soon to write editorials about it.

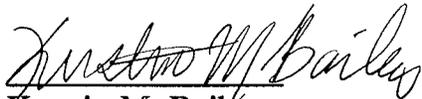
VIII. Discussion of Next Agenda

The next agenda will be similar to this week's agenda.

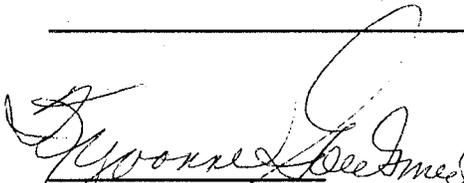
IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m. by the Chair.

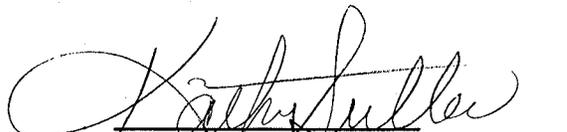
Respectfully submitted,



Kerstin M. Bailey
Recording Secretary



Yvonne Goldsmith, Secretary



Kathy Sutter, Commission Chair

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
Speakers at February 22, 1995 Meeting
Lynden, Washington

1. Martin Van Buren, 623 E. Wiser Ridge, Lynden, WA 98264 354-1554
(See handout)
 - We should go back to a Commissioner form of government.
 - Council Members should have access to all administrative departments.
 - Council Members should remain part-time.
 - District representatives should be elected by their own district.
 - A new district should be created within the corporate area of Bellingham.

2. Frank Winslow, 433 17th St., Bellingham, WA 98225 734-9586
(see handout and Jan.18, 1995 letter)
 - Discussed problems with the Northwest Regional Council and the North Sound Regional Support Network, particularly the lack of accountability and cooperation. In order for the citizens to complain, they are forced to go to the State level if these groups represent more than one county. Counties should cooperate on their own initiative, not because the State requires it.
 - Recommended language change to the Home Rule Charter, Section 1.20.
 - Revise Section 3 in order to make the Executive an appointed position.
 - Five Council Members instead of seven, full-time instead of part-time.

3. Richard Gilda, 2727 Jensen Rd., Bellingham, WA 696-0885
 - Opposed to Commissioner form of government: each Council is getting better.
 - Having seven Council Members ensures that each district is always represented and gives the public more people to talk to.
 - Bellingham should have its own district, so that outlying district areas aren't out-voted and so that its representatives can know what Bellingham really wants.
 - The Executive shouldn't be appointed, because it would just be adding another Council Member to the staff.
 - We need more checks and balances. The Council should have veto power.
 - Elect the Planning Department head. Then, the people have no one to blame but themselves.

4. Bob Ewing, 9621 Harvey Rd., Blaine, WA 332-6678
 - Problems with having an appointed manager:
 - The United States government has three branches in order to ensure a balance of power, which has worked extremely well.
 - Appointees are loyal to the people who appoint them. They are not loyal to the people, and the public has no control over them.

5. Bill Geyer, 1008 16th St., Bellingham, WA 98225 733-1824
 - Recommended that the Commission line up each alternative with descriptions, find out how much the executive and legislative branches cost, gather information about the other counties in the U.S., and do some comparative analysis.

-Get information from the International City Managers' Association in Washington D.C.

-The need of professional managers came out of the reform movement of 1910. They found that they had municipal entities that needed hands-on management. This trend is going the other direction now, because voters want that person to be directly accountable.

-Current problems are the result of middle and senior managers seeing themselves in a governing position, rather than in a position of service providers. Thus, the problem is with individuals, not the overall structure.

-He believes that Whatcom County voters strongly want the right to put someone in or take them out; they want to maintain that accountability.

-Having seven Council Members allows for diversity of opinion, which is important in policy-making decisions.

-Boards and Commissions should be elected, so that there is a higher level of accountability (i.e. the Humane Society) .

-Whatever changes are made should be made with a smooth transition as quickly as possible.

6. Jason Reimer

-Each district should vote only for its own people. I don't want someone else voting for someone in my neighborhood or Bellingham controlling the vote.

-A new district in Bellingham would be a very good idea, so that Bellingham can vote for themselves.

-He is in favor of the new county idea, because it's the only chance to downsize the bureaucracy that we've got. Government never voluntarily downsizes. We're fed up out here!

-There's no financially feasible recourse for people to address a problem with a decision, especially with the Planning Department. If someone makes in the administration makes a decision, the only appeal is to sue the County, which has your tax dollars to fight you with.

-Buildings and Code and Planning Department heads should be licensed and bonded. They should be accountable just like any of us out here.

-When people run for office, I would like to know whether they're a democrat, a republican or independent. It's easy to hide, but I'd like to see some truth.

-Department heads should be elected.