

**Charter Review Commission  
Other Boards and Agencies  
Subcommittee Meeting  
August 31, 2021**

A meeting of the Charter Review Commission Other Boards and Agencies Subcommittee was held at Charlotte County Administration Complex, Room B-106, Port Charlotte, Florida at 2:00 p.m.

**Roll Call:**

The following members were present:

Theresa Murtha, Chair

Adam Riley

Steve Drake

Citizens: David Kalin, Ginnie Dobrek, Richard Russel, Debra Russell, Gene Murtha.

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 PM by Chairman Theresa Murtha. Chair Murtha welcomed new member Steve Drake to this committee and thanked him from transferring from the Administration/Staff Committee.

**Agenda Items:**

- I. **Citizens Input** – there was some confusion by the citizens present as to which group was meeting today – they misunderstood and thought this was the full Charter Review Commission meeting and not a subcommittee. Agendas were given and information regarding the Charter Review website for more information.
- II. **Questions:** Citizen Debra Russell, Port Charlotte
  - a. Is there a way we can restrict monies raised by each candidate when running for office? This way people do not have to raise a certain amount of money to run for office against people who are being subsidized by companies all over the County who are giving them big monies. The average person cannot run for office. I would like to see in the Charter a set amount of money to be used to run for office. To reduce costs, maybe the newspaper would allow a column and/or there could be a Public forum with questions and answers that could be televised across the county.
  - b. Age Restriction – I think to run for City Council or the Commission there should be a minimum age of 25/30. If you can't drink at 18, why would you want someone serving on the City Council?
  - c. Citizen Richard Russell: Please ask Robert Hancik -What is your position on privatizing the airport?

**III. Minutes from August 3, 2021**

**MOTION WAS MADED BY ADAM RILEY AND SECONDED BY STEVE DRAKE TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM AUGUST 3, 2021. MOTION CARRIED.**

**IV. Old Business:**

a. Reviewed upcoming interviews: The committee added the following persons to be interviewed: Pattie Aho from Rotunda West Civic Association, John Welsh, Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association and Bob White, Charlotte County Chamber (2<sup>nd</sup> request).

#### **IV. New Business:**

##### **2:15 Meeting with Lynn Matthew, Punta Gorda Mayor**

##### **Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators?**

Yes, for the County Commissioners. It is a long time to service the community. Not enough people in our community to volunteer to run for public office. I think three, 4-year terms are sufficient in serving the community.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** Not more – meetings run too long now. One representative from each District is sufficient.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** Absolutely. They have a vested interest if they live in the County.

**Should Constitutional Officers be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners or elected?** Absolutely, Elected.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** Appointed by the County Commissions. They need to be able to vet candidates who they know they can have a good working relationship. To be elected would be a travesty. With an appointment you get a much more tuned in candidate who can work with everyone involved on a day-to-day basis.

**Should the percentage of the required signatures for the public to propose a change or a new ordinance be reduced or increased from 10 percent to another number?** No, I think ten percent is appropriate.

**Should the State of Florida pass Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County citizens to give input to the County on Casino Gambling?** I think it needs to be a Referendum on a Ballot for the residents to voter and decide.

**Should the Charter Review Commission recommend changes to the Home Rule Charter that would help in business development efforts or to improve the business climate in Charlotte County? What changes would you recommend in that regard?** No, I think the Economic Development Office does a good job looking for new businesses to bring into the community. Dave Gammon is very effective in what he does.

**Do you think the County should have a requirement by the Charter to update their comprehensive plan on a specific schedule? Should the Charter require specific elements to be within that plan? For instance, water resources.** No specific regular schedule. We do it when a change occurs in Punta Gorda like rezoning or annexation.

**Is the project selection allocation process for the one percent sales tax in the best interest of the overall county and fair to every region of the county?** I served on the One Percent Sales Tax committee and I am completely unhappy with what happened with that whole plan. We spent many hours reviewing proposals. The City is treated like a stepchild. We are the

only municipality in the County that is an incorporated City. We got zero dollars out of that program. We only get the 10 percent because we are 10 percent of the County. The committee approved as our number one priority the Parking Garage at the Event Center. It was removed from the list entirely by the time it got to the Commissioners. I am very unhappy about that. Renovation of the Punta Gorda Library was on our top ten list at a cost of \$500,000. By the time it got to the County it was over three million and vetoed off the list. I understand there are a lot of projects to be funded but our committee was very strong about certain projects. By the time the list was given to the County Commissioners, it was a completely different list. The whole process was very disorganized.

Murtha -What changes would you do to make the One Percent process better? 1) We received a Binder – with list of projects pre-selected and told to pick from them. 2) We were not allowed to add projects to the list. Suggestions had to come during citizen input (plants in the audience). 3) Better way for the decision-making meeting to get to the Board of County Commissioners. 4) Need a spokesperson from the committee to present proposals to the Board of County Commissioners. Members very upset about what happened to the parking garage – should have been built with the building.

Riley – who developed the project list? County Staff – huge spreadsheet of possible projects. We voted generically for a priority listing. Different list was presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

Murtha – what is this Ten percent that comes to the City? Ten percent of the one percent comes to Punta Gorda because they represent ten percent of the County.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** Hope they follow their own guidance. Maybe an annual review and a project status update. The City has a separate committee and a separate list of projects.

**Should there be a requirement for an Environment impact planning?** I think the County Commissioners are already doing that. Water quality appears very frequently on their Agendas. For example, septic to sewer projects. We are being forced in this direction to eventually have no more septic systems, especially if you live on water. Water salinization? Overkill, maybe if you lived on an island. I think we have adequate water supplies and don't need to go that far.

**Should there be a need Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** We are having discussions about that right now. I spoke with several of the Commissioners, and it was a discussion item on one of their last Agendas. Possible future joint meeting between City Council and Board of County Commissioners regarding issues that affect us both equally and for the betterment of the County. Murtha – what about other leadership? Very difficult to accomplish – too many opinions and not very productive. Once you start including other organizations you will have them coming with their own agendas. I do not think you would accomplish much.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?**  
No – well written. Should check effective dates before it is presented again.

**Are there any issues such as Charlotte County geographic jurisdiction for water resources that might be address by the CRC?** No, we have an inner-local agreement with the County for our water plants and reservoirs. We work closely with the Southwest Florida Water management – we all work cohesively together. We have back-ups in case of an emergency need for water. Not too much more than can be done.

Murtha – any further comments regarding changes or suggestions for the Charter? More inclusion with Punta Gorda when the County makes decisions because it affects us too. Currently we have a better working relationship than over the last 20 years. Since I've gotten on Council, I've made a concerted effort to open relationships with the Commissioners. We have a pretty good understanding of the needs and wants of each other. We need to work together for all.

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### **3:00 Interview with Robert Hancik, Airport Authority**

**Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators?** Yes and No. I have 17 years' experience with this County. If we had a contentious election cycle I would say yes. Currently, we do not have issues with the County Commissioners – and no recent history. If we were to have term limits I would be in favor of 12 years – 3-four-year terms.

**Do you think if we limited contributions to election funds, would the elections be more contentious?** Depends on where the money comes from. From my own experience, you need to be careful of the dark money/Pac money that comes from Tallahassee. I don't see a lot of that in the County Commission races. They do have to raise a lot of money to run – advertisements are expensive. There is a \$1,000 limit that a person or company can give. If dark money come into the program, the sky's the limit.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** Five is plenty.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** Depending on the definition, department heads should reside within the limits of the County. Exception clause needed if currently employed, living outside of the County but promoted to department manager – but should be a requirement for all newly employed department heads. Lots of influence in the County.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** Appointed.

**Should the percentage of the required signatures for the public to propose a change or a new ordinance be reduced or increased from 10 percent to another number?** Should be reduced to 5% because would involve more citizens in local government. Do not see much input from voters unless a big issue. Would be more opportunity to become involved in County government if the percentage dropped down to 5%. With 5%, you are still talking about roughly the need for 7500 signatures.

**Should the State of Florida pass Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County citizens to give input to the County on Casino Gambling?** Yes. Should be left to the Voters and not just to the County Commissioners. If the State Legislature provides for a local option, yes, we should have it in the Charter. I see us as a retirement community, not a casino town. Our demographics are changing and if things keep going the way it is currently, you will see the average age of our citizens lowered and they might be looking for that type of thing.

**Should the Charter Review Commission recommend changes to the Home Rule Charter that would help in business development efforts or to improve the business climate in Charlotte County? What changes would you recommend in that regard?** I do not see

anything in the Charter that prohibits a business from coming into the County. No need for a change.

**Do you think the County should have a requirement by the Charter to update their comprehensive plan on a specific schedule? Should the Charter require specific elements to be within that plan? For instance, water resources.** Yes – no longer than ten years. In this day, things change quickly. Five years is quick, but a 10-year review should be mandated. Basically, a Master Plan.

**Is the project selection allocation process for the one percent sales tax in the best interest of the overall county and fair to every region of the county?** Yes, because it is brought before the voters, everyone has the opportunity to give input. The public meetings advertising discussion on the list of projects is probably not advertised well. Major issues (the pocketbook of the voter) that deal with taxes, master plans, etc. should have full page ads – not the small legal ads that nobody reads. The notification process needs to change.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** Yes. I know of incidents where some of the project monies were not being spent correctly. A penalty or mechanism to check on the projects should be in place. An oversight committee can check funds/cost overruns and to see if appropriately spent.

**Should there be a requirement for an Environment impact planning?** Yes, most major projects today require that you have an environment impact study. Makes sense to have.

**Should there be a need Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** I think you get that in the Master Planning process. Public hearings in the major stages. Leadership getting together – Yes, it makes sense but depends on how you define “leadership”, i.e., elected, or constitutional officers. People are elected to offices based on leadership qualities they can bring to the office.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?** The Charter is fairly flexible as written. Doesn't put any real handcuffs on anything you might want to do.

**Airport Authority: Business development is of primary importance at present. Should the CRC recommend changes to the Home Rule Charter that would help the airport in business development efforts?** We are okay there; we are managing to take care of development as it comes along.

**What is your view of privatization of the Airport?** Obviously not! I led the bandwagon to get that issue defeated. However, you will possibly see the issue come up again in the next election cycle. Two seats up for election, mine, and Kathleen Copeland. I will be running and have filed. Rep. Grant will propose change on how airport authority members are elected; removing the requirement on being in a District and increasing the number to seven. If this happens, privatization will become an issue again. If the airport goes private, they will drain all the financial resources out of the Airport. Allegiant and Sun County airlines would still have to approve privatization – two-thirds of airport must approve). Federal Law states all airport revenue must be spent on the airport for airport purposes. Three P's – Public, Private, Partnerships (can be used for special project like a

parking garage) – with privatization any private investment can be spent anywhere in the community. Airport is a special district – operates independent of the County Commission. No tax money involved. Under Federal and State jurisdiction. Created by the State Legislature and they can change the make-up by taking a vote – without the voter’s approval. Charlotte County voters should have the opportunity to vote on the policy change. If the airport authority is dissolved, it reverts to County ownership – that is the only way. Murtha -Should the County Charter find some way to protect against this? The best airports in the country are run by Airport Authority – keeps politics out as it is run as a business, the authority can move more quickly than County government. The airport is very successful. Has 35 million in the bank, of which 15 million is earmarked to run the airport for one year with no revenues. The rest is earmarked for our capital improvement projects. Covid funding has allowed us to move forward with more capital projects.

**Financing of elections:** For instance we had 3 candidates for 3 seats – one spent \$25 and was elected; one spent zero and was elected and one spent tens of thousands and was elected. Are we prohibiting people from running because of the costs? I don’t think so. I’m not spending a lot of money. Last campaign I spent \$9,000 (\$6,000 was from donations). Advertising is expensive – the only other avenues to get the word out is through signage and political clubs.

**Minimal Age for someone to run?** Look for the experience.  
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**3:45 Interview with Arthur McGinnes, representing Veterans in our Community.**

**Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators?**  
Yes. Maybe not local elections, maybe yes, reluctantly. Board of County Commissioners are doing a great job. State Legislators – yes; Local, no.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** I think five is fine.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** Definitely.

**Should Constitutional Officers be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners or elected?** Elected.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** Appointed.

**Should the percentage of the required signatures for the public to propose a change or a new ordinance be reduced or increased from 10 percent to another number?** Keep the same at 10%.

**Should the State of Florida pass Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County citizens to give input to the County on Casino Gambling?** Yes. I don’t like casinos. I think the citizens should have a vote on casinos as it could affect our lives severely. I think Sunseeker might bring something like that to Charlotte County.

**Should the Charter Review Commission recommend changes to the Home Rule Charter that would help in business development efforts or to improve the business climate in**

**Charlotte County? What changes would you recommend in that regard?** Small business in bogged down in paperwork; big business has too much power. Sunseeker would have made a nice park. Infrastructure is a mess – access to I75; Sunseeker will make it worse. It should be easier for local business to open.

**Do you think the County should have a requirement by the Charter to update their comprehensive plan on a specific schedule? Should the Charter require specific elements to be within that plan? For instance, water resources.** Yes. Every two or three, we are growing very fast. More frequently at least.

**Is the project selection allocation process for the One Percent Sales Tax in the best interest of the overall County and fair to every region of the County?** Yes. A lot of people don't like it. I think it fair.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** Yes. If you handle the money, you need oversight.

**Should there be a requirement for an Environment Impact planning?** Yes. Water quality is important.

**Should there be a need for a Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** Yes. Good idea just rename it from Congress.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?**

1) Elected Officials should not own a business in the County. Yes, they can recuse themselves.

2) Why Can you run for office if just lived in County for 6 months. That's a disgrace. Too many people care coming down from up north because they don't like what is happening there. Most local organizations ask you to be a member in good standing for one year before running for office. Let them live here for two years. Need to live here longer than six months before being put into a position where you make changes in this County. The person needs to be full-time resident and not a snowbird.

Commission Deutsch has done a great deal for Veterans in the County. I would like to see the County continue their support of Veterans. We appreciate everything they have done for us.

## **V. Discussion:**

Discussed some of the issues raised. Need to review the other Charters to see what they say about gambling, residency, airports and to bring forward the statements,

**VI. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 4:05 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 13, 2021 @ 2:00 p.m.

  
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Theresa Murtha, Chair      Date

Other Boards & Agencies Sub-committee