



**CITY OF OKEECHOBEE  
CITIZENS CHARTER REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MARCH 25, 2021  
OFFICIAL MINUTES**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Ritter called the regular meeting of the Citizens Charter Review Advisory Committee (CCRAC) for the City of Okeechobee to order on Thursday, March 25, 2021, at 6:30 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida. The invocation was given by Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. ATTENDANCE**

The following CCRAC Members were present: Suzanne Bowen, Noel Chandler, Jamie Gamiotea, Jeremy LaRue (entered Chambers at 6:36 P.M.), Sandy Perry, Cary Pigman, Gary Ritter, Myranda Whirls and Hoot Worley. Ex officio Members Marcos Montes De Oca and Wes Abney were present as well as City Attorney John Fumero, General Services Coordinator Patty Burnette, and Executive Assistant Robin Brock.

**III. AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- A. Motion by Member Worley, seconded by Member Perry to adopt the agenda as presented. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**
- B. There were no comment cards submitted for public participation for any issues not on the agenda.

**IV. MINUTES**

- A. Motion by Member Worley, seconded by Member Perry to dispense with the reading and approve the March 4, 2021, Regular Meeting minutes. **Motion Carried Unanimously.** Future minutes will reflect public participants and their comments.

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Chairperson Ritter expressed his appreciation of this committee's time spent and their efforts to date. He suggested to be able to move along at a little faster pace, the committee first focus on the major components of the charter document and then after the City Attorney revises it with their recommendations, then look at punctuation and other minor changes. In addition, he suggested starting the meetings sooner and finishing within two hours. Consensus of the committee was to start the meetings at 6:00 P.M. and end at 8:00 P.M. for the following dates: April 8, April 22, May 13, and May 27, 2021.
- B. Members continued their discussion of Article 2 of the Model City Charter prepared by Attorney Fumero, starting with C-2.4, Qualifications. Consensus of the Committee was to not include a specific amount due for qualifying and simply state an election fee payment will need to be made to the City Clerk.

## V. NEW BUSINESS

ITEM B CONTINUED: In addition, strike out any mention of Mayor as all candidates are for the position of City Council. No changes to C-2.5(a). Under C-2.5(b)(iii), change to state if a public hearing is requested, notice thereof shall be published in one or more newspapers of general circulation, or other means deemed acceptable by resolution. C-2.5(c)(i), amend the paragraph to reflect if the Mayor's position becomes vacant, and no more than six months remain in the unexpired term of the Mayor, the Vice-Mayor shall complete the term of Mayor. If more than six (6) months remain in the unexpired term of the Mayor, the vacancy shall be filled by City Council. Delete the remainder of the paragraph. Under C-2.5(c)(ii), Chairperson Ritter asked City Clerk Lane Gamiotea to speak as to the policies/procedures that are currently followed. Clerk Gamiotea explained should there be more than 24 months remaining in the term, then a Special Election would be required. She further explained there are other factors to consider. One being whether the period falls within the same year as a General Election, another being must take into account Special Election procedures are governed by state statutes which dictate the time frames, election procedures, printing of ballots and mail in ballot procedures. Furthermore, they are very costly. Her recommendation is between 18-24 months Consensus of the Committee was to keep at 24 months and change the wording to City Council from Mayor to reflect being filled by a nominee. C-2.5(c)(iii) and (iv) are ok. C-2.5(c)(v) if no quorum then Council members that are present can then fill the seat. C-2.5(c)(vi) ok. C-2.6 amend wording of second sentence to reflect compensation, as established by ordinance, shall be increased in accordance with the U.S. Consumer Price Index. Add additional compensation for the Mayor but not reflect a specific amount. No changes to C-2.7.

- C. Members discussed in detail Article 3 of the Model City Charter prepared by Attorney Fumero. Chairperson Ritter began the discussion by reviewing two organizational charts he prepared after the last meeting (copies were distributed to Committee members). One example showed the positions of Chief of Police, City Attorney, City Administrator and City Clerk as appointed by the City Council and the City Administrator as the department head for the Public Works, Finance and General Services Departments. The other showed the position of the City Clerk being elected by the citizens and the remainder being the same as in the first example. Discussion then focused on items C-3.1 the City Administrator, and C-3.2 powers and duties of the City Administrator. Current Police Chief Bob Peterson addressed the committee expressing his concerns with having the position of City Administrator appointing, supervising, and firing his position and the positions of all the police department employees. He strongly feels the Police Department should have freedom of movement without political interference and should not report to a civilian employee. This organization should report directly to the City Council which is in direct line to reporting to the citizens. Consensus of the Committee was the position of the Police Chief would be under the direction of the City Council and that position would have authority over the police department employees. Discussion then turned to the position of City Clerk and whether the position should be elected or appointed and under the direction of the City Administrator position.



**NEW BUSINESS**

ITEM C CONTINUED: Clerk Gamiotea was asked to discuss her position. In her 31 years as a City Employee, she worked as the Deputy City Clerk for 14 years and the remainder as the City Clerk. She has always run unopposed. There have been two times in the past people have considered running although once they understand the duties verses what the pay is, they change their minds. She prefers the position to be elected as it provides the citizens an office at the City they can go to. An elected position allows her to be neutral as she does not work for the Council or department heads. Anyone can come to her to discuss issues or grievances. In 2002 it was voted down 2 to 1 to change the position to appointed. Currently in the State of Florida there are 13 Clerks that are still elected. They are all located in rural communities except for the City of Sebring. Almost every time it comes up to have the position appointed there, it is voted down. There were 128 Clerks elected back in 1989. In addition to the duties of Clerk, she is the Personnel Administrator and the Records Custodian. The consensus of the Committee was to have the position of City Clerk remain as elected.

- D. Next agenda items will be finish discussion on the remainder of Article 3 of the Model City Charter.

**VI.****ADJOURN MEETING**

Chairperson Ritter adjourned the meeting at 8:18 P.M.

Submitted by:

Patty M. Burnette

Patty M. Burnette

Approved on: 4-22-2021

Please take notice and be advised that when a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Citizens Charter Review Advisory Committee with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, he/she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. City Clerk media are for the sole purpose of backup for official records of the Clerk.