

**Charter Review Commission  
Board of County Commissioners  
Subcommittee Meeting  
December 11, 2015**

A meeting of the Charter Review Commission, Board of County Commissioners Subcommittee was held at Charlotte County Administration Complex, Room B-106, Port Charlotte, Florida.

Roll Call

The following Board of County Commissioners members were present:

William Abbatematteo, Chairman

Paula Hess

Jim M. Brown

Raymond A. Corcoran (alternate)

Absent members:

Thomas P. Conroy III

Citizens:

None

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 PM by Chairman Abbatematteo.

Agenda Items:

- I. Approval of October 19, 2015 meeting minutes; signed and adopted.
- II. Citizens Input – None
- III. Old Business  
Interview was previously scheduled with Commissioner Tricia Duffy. The interviewee had been provided the list of questions prior to this meeting.
- IV. New Business  
William Abbatematteo – We have prepared some topics and may ask other questions in response to your answers.

Interview with Commissioner Tricia Duffy

Elections by District

Commissioner Duffy – I believe that all five (5) of us help out people in each district, so I do not think that would give them better representation. Obviously District 5 is my priority, but if someone from another district contacts me with a problem I do not hesitate to help them. I really consider myself a Commissioner for the whole County. My preference is at large, I think what we have now works fine.

Paula Hess – It would add too much expenses to have two (2) Commissioners at large.

Commissioner Duffy – Yes it would; two (2) Commissioners, two (2) assistants and with five (5) people it is hard to make decisions sometimes.

William Abbatematteo – Do you find at times you are stretched too thin?

Commissioner Duffy – I think our staff is stretched thin, but as far as the Commissioners are considered, no. I think the decisions that we make would have to be made overall.

Paula Hess – Another negative that has been expressed with Elections by District is that it gets to be intramural battles.

Jim M. Brown – Also, another problem you would have with the extra two (2) Commissioners they would be lobbied by the other five (5) to get their votes.

#### Non-Partisan Elections

Commissioner Duffy – I think we are fine the way we are. Although, the argument could be made that many of the things we make decisions on have no effect on whether you are a Republican, Democrat or Independent. We all happen to be Republicans which is a good thing because we all are very frugal with the tax payer dollars. We are always looking at ways to save money.

Paula Hess – Do you get financial aid from the parties? In other words, so more people have a chance to run if they are not able to finance their own campaign.

Commissioner Duffy – Not in the primary.....

Paula Hess – Do you get training as far as how to run a campaign or any help?

Commissioner Duffy – I think they do, they started that after I got on the commission.

#### Term Limits

Commissioner Duffy – I do not think we need Term Limits. It takes a long time it is such a learning curve. There is so much information. If someone is only in the office for four (4) years that is not long enough. You need somebody with a historical perceptive.

Jim M. Brown – I think Term Limits is one of the problems we have throughout all government. I agree Term Limits is a learning experience.

#### Elected Mayor

Paula Hess – The suggestion was an Elected Mayor who had administrative duties also.

Commissioner Duffy – I strongly disagree on that, first of all it is naturally for cities, for the county it would be County Administrator or a County Manager based on what I have heard from other people around the state. We have enough politicians we do not need another politician, we really don't. I have worked with three (3) County Administrators and Mr. Sandrock is by far the best and he balances our opinions. He has brought so much to the table that many people do not even know about. For example, we had no strategic plan, nothing that drove our budget and he hired Mr. Burger who is one of the best Budget Directors we ever had.

Appointed Sheriff

Paula Hess – The argument for appointed Sheriff is that you could forecast all over the country for someone highly qualified who will accept your pay grade.

Commissioner Duffy – I think elected is working really well right now.

Paula Hess – Would you have more control over his budget if the position is appointed?

Commissioner Duffy – We still have to approve his budget and it is really a great process, he lets us know what is going on and breaks down cost of what is needed. Now we have the Sheriff's budget in a separate category the citizens actually can see it on their bill.

William Abbatematteo – From my past experience, appointing a Sheriff brings politics into the department.

Paula Hess – So the top five (5) topics you would recommend not changing in the Charter.

Commissioner Duffy – Yes.

Dealing only with MSBU/TU's; do you favor adding periodic review and where appropriate, sun setting language?

Paula Hess – This suggestion came forward from another subcommittee; they want language to be written in the Charter regarding periodic review and sun setting language.

Commissioner Duffy – Well it depends, some MSBU's work really well and some do not.

William Abbatematteo – But you would renew them that is what they suggest, they automatically sunset so it would have to be a proactive renewal rather than some just sitting there.

Commissioner Duffy – Well, we just sunset one because they finished everything they needed to do. If the goal of the MSBU's or MSTU's is completed then you need to sunset it. This is a big topic, a lot of people are against MSBU's and MSTU's, but we have so much work in road projects, storm water projects and dredging. It has to be done and paid for. People living on a canal want it dredged because they want to get their boats out, you cannot blame them for that, but they should pay for it, not all tax payers. The whole idea of MSBU's really is a good idea. Some people in certain areas want nice street lights and they do not mind paying for them. They want their neighborhood to look nice and it will improve their property value. Some people want sidewalks because they are worried about their children walking to school or the bus stop.

Paula Hess – Some people are very resentful of them. Also, the other idea that came forward was should the creation of these units appear on the ballot?

Commissioner Duffy – I do not think you could unless you do it at a primary or general election. I do not know if the voting districts would correspond with the MSBU's. Also, really the whole idea of MSBU's is to have citizens on the MSBU Committee.

Jim M. Brown – I am Vice Chairman of the South Burnt Store MSBU and ours has worked perfect because people get involved. Where I found MSBU's has a problem is no one wants to take the time to get involved.

Commissioner Duffy – We have budget meetings that nobody comes to. Why don't they have a MSBU Committee of five (5) people in the neighborhood that would be willing to help make these decisions on behalf of the residents?

Paula Hess – So your answer we can take back to the subcommittee is that you are doing a periodic review and you are sun setting those that are completed. You do not think creation can appear on the ballot because they do not coincide with the districts in which the voting takes place. The basic idea is good because people can then improve their communities as they see fit and can afford.

Commissioner Duffy – I think MSBU's are a good thing, they are not perfect.

William Abbatematteo – A question was raised by a citizen group, should we be taxing churches?

Commissioner Duffy – I would be inclined to think that maybe we should not tax churches, but remember there are roads leading in and out. Sometimes they have big pieces of property and the roads have to be paved and maintained. The grass has to be cut around their property. I do not believe this is a Charter Review mandate I believe this is something that should be discussed with the Commissioners.

Paula Hess – We will discuss it at the full Commission meeting. I do not know if we could put it in as a Charter change. Maybe if we only go in with the MSBU's language that they could create them, but not for churches.

William Abbatematteo – Again, it goes to a deeper argument that government shall make no law interfering with places of worship. You are taxing us twice, at home and if I decide to go to church.

Any changes, additions you would like to see in the Charter and why?

Paula Hess – Regarding your governance as a Commissioner of Charlotte County, do you have any?

Commissioner Duffy – It is not a Charter change, but I want to make you aware Florida has an open record law which is called the Freedom of Information Act. You contact the County and say I want to see a certain document or get copies. I do not disagree with that at all, except we have a really bad abuse problem going on. Sometimes they are asking for items on our public website. These people are purposely harassing us and abusing this law. We had to add a new position to this year's budget that does nothing but handle these request. It is costing the tax payers a lot of money.

Economic Development Director is now employed by the Commission, better than employed by the Administrator or not? ~ Explain

Paula Hess – Do you find this works better than being employed by the Administrator?

Commissioner Duffy – I was not in favor at first, but I really think it is working fine now.

Paula Hess – Do you think the County has lost business with organizations that do not want their negotiations made public?

Commissioner Duffy – It is still not made public, we do maintain confidentiality. The Economic Development Director comes around every Monday and meets with each of us individually. In fact it is only discussed in an open meeting when it gets to the point they want to acquire property, need an incentive, when it is time to vote or approval is needed for something.

Paula Hess – Do you ever feel that deadline decisions are presented to the Commission without sufficient information provided by staff?

Jim M. Brown – It goes back to the sunshine law, where you have to make a decision and you have not really had time to get all of the information, is that realistic?

Commissioner Duffy – We have had some situations where we had very little time to make a decision, but that is what Pre-Agenda is for. Beforehand we meet with staff, get materials and ask questions. Then we come to Pre-Agenda with our questions and then at the Commission meeting we still ask questions if necessary. Most of the time we have sufficient time, rarely we have additional addendums.

Do you think there are inefficiencies that an independent body to oversee and review could correct?

Paula Hess – A complaint I generally receive about Charlotte County is regarding Customer Service and problems with the permitting process. I explain those are things we cannot address in the Charter. The only way you can is to have an independent body that oversees the problems in government. Do you think an independent body to oversee and review would be helpful? That could be put in the Charter.

Commissioner Duffy – No, that is what we are for, that is our job. We are citizens first before we are elected officials.

Paula Hess – If you get a complaint about staff how do you handle that?

Commissioner Duffy – I get feedback all the time then if necessary I would go to Mr. Sandrock and I have in the past.

Paula Hess – Have you had Customer Service training for your staff?

Commissioner Duffy – Absolutely, but we never had it before Mr. Sandrock. We have it for directors, managers, all staff. There definitely has been an improvement.

Paula Hess – I have seen improvement, but this question came up from our subcommittee. Would the Charlotte Assembly be the venue in which they could analyze problems with government?

William Abbatematteo – The proposal is to have an independent citizen group of 100 plus people to get involved and give direction, planning, ideas and work together as a group. The problem is it meets consequently when there is a sales tax proposed. We are discussing putting it in the Charter. I would propose every three (3) years, only because you always have a new Commissioner who is in office during that Assembly.

Commissioner Duffy – That would be fine, but what I think would be better than having an oversee committee is citizens need to come to commission meetings, budget meetings and get involved. We have public comment and it is now at the last commission meeting of the month at 1:00 p.m. They have suggestions, ideas, complaints, and sometimes they say you guys are doing a good job. We need more input on a regular basis, it can be attendance at meetings or emails.

William Abbatematteo – The problem is 100 people are not going to show up at commission meetings, that is why the Assembly is at least a vehicle, not as an oversight, I am not implying that at all. I just think it is a great mechanism for input and follow-up.


Commissioner Duffy – I think Commissioners should be allowed to participate and go to the meeting. I would really like a written report to hear what people are saying.

William Abbate Matteo – I would recommend not letting staff run the meeting, because people felt that it was being steered. Especially when a lot of our recommendations did not get in the final report and we were assured every recommendation would be.

Commissioner Duffy – This is the first commission that has paid attention to the recommendations of the Charlotte Assembly.

Commissioner Duffy was thanked for her time and input.

- V. Discussion  
Our next meeting is scheduled for December 15, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. with Commissioner Christopher Constance.
- VI. Citizens Input – None
- VII. Adjournment: Upon motion made and seconded the meeting was adjourned at 2:38 PM.

  
William Abbate Matteo, Chairman