

**Charter Review Commission
Administration Staff
Subcommittee Meeting
August 23, 2021**

A meeting of the Charter Review Commission Administration Staff Subcommittee was held at Charlotte County Administration Center, 18500 Murdock Circle, Room B-106, Port Charlotte, Florida at 10:00 A.M. on August 23, 2021.

Roll Call:

The following members were present:

Donna Barrett, Chairman
Cherie Burnette
Cyril Schrage

Members Absent:
Steve Vieira

Citizens: None present.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 AM by Chairman Donna Barrett

Approval of Minutes:

Minute approval tabled.

Agenda Items:

I. **Citizens Input** – None.

II. **Old Business**

a. None

III. **New Business:**

a. 10:15 Interview with Tommy Scott, Community Services – Tommy Scott has lived in Charlotte County for 8.5 years and previously lived in Idaho before moving here. He has a Degree in Leisure Management. Tommy enjoys living and working in Charlotte County.

1. **What are your specific duties and in the performance of those duties what, if any, local government re-structuring could be proposed for the Charter that would improve your ability to deliver services?** Community Services is made up of several different divisions; Parks and Natural Resources, Recreation, Libraries and History, Extension Office (University of Florida), Charlotte Sports Park, Event Center, Mass Care Coordinator (Hurricanes, Food Distribution, Covid – Testing, vaccination sites and Antibody treatments.) Schrage – what type of

staff do you have? We have fulltime, parttime and seasonal employees. We are a-typical of other County Departments. We run 7 days a week, 14 hours a day and 361 days a year so it takes a mix of employees to run the operations. We have 300 - 375 employees that floats because of what is currently happening (like Spring Training or summer camps.) We have lots of volunteers to help like coaches and Master Gardeners. Sadly, I have no recommendations for the Charter as this structure works well for our departments and teams and it benefits the community. Schrage – do you report to the Board of County Commissioners? No, I report to the Deputy Administrator, Emily Lewis, but I fall under the purview of Administrator Hector Flores.

2. Have you read the Charlotte County Charter and how is your job performance affected by the Charter?

Yes, I have read the Charter frequently to make sure I am aware of how to run our operations. The framework guides and directs how we perform our work daily. I serve at the pleasure of Mr. Flores, but I am responsive to the Board of County Commissioners and to our citizens.

3. Have you had experience working under an elected Administrator, and what is your opinion on an elected Executive form of government?

Yes, I have worked under an elected Administrator in different positions before arriving here. The current structure in Charlotte County of elected officials and an appointed County Administrator works the best. By the Charter, the Board sets policy and Administrator directs the business of the County. There is a lot of conflict between elected officials as they are looking to be re-elected. When you have competing elected officials between policy and administration, it makes it difficult, when conflicts arise that were not necessary – by pulling political aspirations. This form allows the Board to stay focused on policies and goals and how we will move forward as a community and then this allows Administration staff to implement goals and policy. Local government is the best form of government because it is close to the people. I truly believe it. I love to serve the community and have done so throughout my careers. This form of government serves great benefits for the community.

4. In your experience is the non-interference clause observed? Is the method of enforcement adequate?

Yes. We talk about it at executive team level meetings and address issues. There is an open-door policy to discuss and Administration which address with the Board of County Commissioners if needed. Schrage – Do you get any complaints from citizens about how things are handled in the community? Yes. Two times a month at Board meetings or there are many avenues for citizens to reach us. There is an online app to submit questions, concerns, grievances which are forwarded to Administration and the Board of County Commissioners. We, as experts reply to the calls and emails from citizens. We try very hard to keep the citizens happy as much of the time as possible. Schrage - Is there a procedure in place? Yes, besides the Board of County Commissioners, there are many Board appointed advisory boards that we support, (parks and recreation, historical advisory board, environmental sensitive land oversight committee)– citizens participate and/or can come to monthly meetings and bring forward issues. We do follow through, answer, and document those issues. We want to provide continued exceptional public service.

5. How do you create the budget for your departments? The structure of our Budget creation is developed by our Budget and Administrative Services department. They give us the guidance and direction of timelines and expectations. Specifically, I developed a training when I was hired to be a learning process with supervisors, staff and Fiscal. We address items like; why we budget, how we budget, what are our goals and initiatives? This is very intense as we

Budget every two years. We are constantly training our team about how and why we budget due to the nature of staff coming and going. Once we have the training, each Supervisor goes back to their department and works closely with their staff. We want our front-line staff to be an integral part of the budget process to build our budget from the bottom up. We then go through many levels of review processes as we move up the command chain. Finally, we meet with the Fiscal department and then the Board of County Commissioners – there is a whole Board process we must go through statutorily with Public Input and hearings. Barrett – you are given a bottom-up budget? We are given a process of how we are supposed to structure our budget. We start every two years developing a budget from scratch. We are given historical information, 2-3 years of actuals, the current budget, and the line items. We then defend up through all levels up to the Board. Schrage – So, you do not get a figure of what you can spend? No. We have different spreadsheets that show how a certain amount would be spent with each line item. Schrage – are you confident you have a good budget process? My many years and different levels of experience has shown this process works very well for us to justify how we spend the dollars. As a taxpayer of Charlotte County, that is how I would like it done also. We don't have the approach of the mad dash at the end of the year to spend any remaining money. We have a budget, we stay within our budget and work closely with our Fiscal department, Administration, and the Board. Every two weeks we make budgetary adjustments through different departments throughout the County. Schrage – Does your division have reserves? I'm a General Fund supported department. We have no reserves – we are only funded out of the General Fund. There is a County reserve system, but our division does not have one of its own.

6. Should there be a residency requirement for Charlotte County Executive Staff? I have worked with places that do and those that do not. Charlotte County does have a policy for executive level persons, and I have that attached to my position. We spend a tremendous amount of time on recruitment for all levels of employees; that is the greatest resource we have which is our team. We want to hire the right people with the right mind set in stepping forward in community service and to deliver exceptional public service. I don't prefer one way or the other as I have worked both ways. Do I believe that does it help someone perform better in their job? I do not see any information that proves it one way or the other. I am impartial. I serve at the pleasure and will do what this community needs. Schrage – do you have a contract for your position? I do not – I serve at the pleasure. Schrage - do you feel you should have a contract for your position? No, not at all. I've never had a contract in all my years of public service. I enjoy my work and I wake up excited every day to go to work knowing every day that I have made a difference in my community's lives. I don't need a contract to do that. Schrage – it seems the way our Charter is set up that if you do a good job, you keep your job. Yes, and that is how it should be.

7. Are there any aspects you know from other communities that the Charter Review Commission should consider for Charlotte County? I do not have any suggestions. I think the Charter works well for our community and has served it well for a long time. I do not have any insights from other communities that I can bring forward.

Other questions – Burnette- do you have any idea on how your department can get more feedback from the community? Community Services does not have that problem. We work diligently to engage the community on feedback at all levels. Surveys and comment cards, public outreach meetings. We engage the community before new programs – What do they want? How to meet the expectations of the citizens. We have several master/community plans that we review. We do county-wide surveys. Parks and recreation are an accredited department. We

have standards to meet to retain this national certification – it requires us to engage the community and to receive feedback. We are front line – we engage our community on a daily basis. We do not have the issue of increasing feedback because of the forward-facing functions of our department. I am always looking for suggestion to improve.

Schrage – do you have any suggestions for us? No. I believe in this form of process. I believe in reviewing the Charter and engaging the community in a conversation to see if there is room for improvement.

Schrage - does your department have any interaction with the Charlotte County Sheriff Department? Almost daily – we would very closely with them. We are responsible for 80 facilities and 8,0000 acres of land we need their help to keep citizens safe so they can enjoy the services we provide. We work closely with the Sheriff to follow all the rules of the County, i.e., Spring Training. Schrage – do you think that would change if the Sheriff was appointed rather than elected? In my experience I have worked with both and do not see much distinction between elected and appointed law enforcement head as they must protect and serve. This Sheriff works very well. As an independent Constitutional Office, it requires him to be beholden and responsible to the community in a much better way – it just functions better – I think it works well.

Thank you for your service – I know it is time consuming.

End Interview:

b. 11:00 Interview with Gordon Burger, Budget Director: I have been here almost twelve years. I am Director of Budget and Administrative Services – I have Fiscal, IT, Real Estate, Purchasing, Risk Management, Record Management, Fleet and Transit Division under my supervision. It is a wide range – I love it – I have great managers – that’s what makes it possible. I come from Michigan and attended the University of Michigan and received my MBA from there. Schrage – have you worked for other counties in a similar position? Prior to this I worked in Washenaw County, the county seat of Ann Arbor – I worked there for 20 years, starting as a budget analyst, ended up as Director of Support Services which is similar to my current position with a few different departments. Schrage – how did you end up here? Due to the recession and the laying off staff, I left my former position in January 2009 and came here in October 2009.

1. What are your specific duties and in the performance of those duties what, if any, local government re-structuring could be proposed for the Charter that would improve your ability to deliver services? My duties were previously stated. I believe the Charter is well written and do not have any recommended changes that would make it easier or better to do my duties. It gives us the flexibility we need to operate as an organization.

2. Have you read the Charlotte County Charter and how is your job performance affected by the Charter? Yes, I have. I do have a suggested change under Article II. Sec. 2.2 D. Authority. Two reviews ago, there was an Amendment added – *"In addition to its other powers and duties, the board of county commissioners shall conduct an annual review of all operations of the county, including all programs and services provided, with input from the public, prior to April first of each year, and take action as a result of this review for improvement of the county and the welfare of its residents."* This was a good idea but the piece about it that makes it onerous is the word **"Annual"**. When you talk about all operations of the county, all programs,

all services, with citizen input and take action on it every year. That is incredibly intensive. We do that with each budget process which is every two years. That gives us the ability to really focus on the budget thoroughly, in-depth, every other year and then we have the off year to focus on more strategic initiatives. This is a lot of work and does not change from year to year. That piece is very onerous and frankly, we are not doing it on the off year to that level. Schrage – what did you do in your previous position? I did a two-year budget in Michigan and then I brought the process here. I don't know of any organization that does a complete operational review every year. A section maybe, but not the whole organization. We generally focus in on a section when there is a change in operations – something triggers the change. Barrett – what do you propose the change to be? Instead of annually, – “in conjunction with the budget process”. Barrett – in what year did this change happen? 2010 and Commissioner Doherty was chair of the charter commission. I've talked with him to understand their thought process. He has been okay doing the review every other year. No one knew at that time that we were going to be doing a two-year budget. Barrett – when did we start the two-year budget change? We started that in 2012. Barrett – this Charter Amendment was put into effect and then two years later we changed to a two-year budget? Yes, correct. Schrage – it sounds like no one is complaining about this and we could continue without changing, but I am certain the average citizen would not understand what we are talking about if we brought it to a vote, but we could certainly look at this. Barrett – this would need to be referred to our attorney.

Another issue is the seven-day posting being difficult for the budget development piece because we are typically working on those proposals up to the last minute. We do it with change memos – sometimes a budget presentation will change 2-3 times before the final proposal because we are constantly working on it. Barrett – are departments getting the information on time? Yes, and we have never gotten a complaint from the citizens. I do not expect it to change. Most people do not even look at the posting.

3. Have you had experience working under an elected Administrator, and what is your opinion on an elected Executive form of government? No, but I have a very strong opinion. I think it would be a disaster. Longevity and direction make an organization great. A new Administrator needs to change things to show how great they are. The Board has the ear of the citizens. If there is a problem with the Administrator, the Board can deal with it directly. An elected Administrator is running on a political not personal basis. The average citizen would not know who would make a great Administrator for the organization. Administration provides the machinery; the Board sets the goals and policies of the organization. Schrage – do you feel your peers have the best interests of the county and citizens? Absolutely. Duration of leadership sets you down the road further a head – you can keep building, not changing directions. With new administration – some shift – some change. I love being a public servant – people take this seriously – love what they do – making the community a better place.

4. In your experience is the non-interference clause observed? Is the method of enforcement adequate? Yes, for the most part. New commissioners sometimes have difficulties figuring out the boundaries. Each one has their own pet areas and sometimes get overzealous. We have a standard way of dealing with it and they respect it. “Commissioner, you need to make sure I get that direction from the Administrator.” No intentional attempts – they just point out things they want done. Best Board I have dealt with in 30 years.

5. How do you create the budget for your departments? A very involved process. The Board of County Commissioners set goals in November/December. We do several things to

gather information for the Board – citizen surveys, citizen outreach meetings, stakeholders, employees. In January the Commissioners hold budget workshops – set their goals and initiatives for two years. We use line-item budget to build the budget – every department has one – Administration gives them parameters. We have a performance-based budget for services. In February departments update their budgets and requests (operational review). In March we meet with each department to go through in details, (critical issues/goals/requests). In April they go the Administration who review each department's budget. In May the Performance based budget goes to the Board and to the Public. This is followed by a series of workshops with the Board who go through the budget based around their key focus areas. For example, the last cycle focused on water quality. Do you want to expend monies on Water Management/Monitoring? In July we get the evaluations from the property appraiser which is the biggest chunk of our revenue. We then present tentative and the entire line-item budget to the Board (140 funds, 500 unique budgets). All this is posted on-line for the citizens to see. Schrage – does anyone every come back with a lower budget than the last year? During the recession we asked for reduced budgets and we reduced the budget by 40%. We were forced to cut to the bone. We have had a flat budget since the recession ended.

6. How can we make the process of committee involvement be more effective regarding the MSBU/TU's? I have no idea. Most people do not know they live in an MSBU area or what an MSBU is until their tax rates go up. When the rates go up, people show up at the Public hearing and learn there is an MSBU Committee and then ask "Who is on this MSBU Committee? They never talked to me." Then the MSBU committee comes under attack. Barrett – there is a huge disconnect in our community about MSBU's – I did not even know I was in one. It is a unique taxing unit – we need more education and information about it in the public sector. Schrage do you know anyone else who has them? Florida is the only state that has them – every state is laid out differently. Here, the unincorporated land is the responsibility of the County and that is why the MSBU systems are so extensive here. We are responsible for providing 90% of the municipal services for the county – we are only about 40 percent built out. We hope to transition in the future (maybe MSTU), but we are not there yet.

7. Should there be a residency requirement for Charlotte County Executive Staff? My personal opinion is yes. I know it is not in the Charter, but when I was hired, I was told residency was a requirement. I think there should be – I am part of this community, I provide services in this community, I take pride in this community – I believe I should live in this community.

8. Do you feel Fiscal Services should report to Administration or the Board of County Commissioners? The Finance office duties are in the Clerk's Office. Fiscal Service is the practical departmental side of that – we have four divisions A/R,A/P, Grants and Capital projects and MSBU's – we don't cut the checks, but we prepare all the paperwork. There is much administrative work, but nothing involved in decision making; it is all machinery making sure everything is accurate and recorded properly. Any discretion is on the operational side which includes the Board and the Budget - we work with the county departments to accomplish this. There is no need to politicalize this – that is just the machinery of the organization and it needs to be separate. The Board can make any adjustment to the Budget at any time and in any way they want. They make adjustments to the Budget every two weeks when they have their meetings. Barrett – is Budget and Fiscal a well-run operation as it is? Yes. The machinery needs to stay separate from the politics.

9. Are there any aspects you know from other communities that the Charter Review Commission should consider for Charlotte County? No, but I would ask you to consider changing the review from every six years to every 10-12 years. I think there is pressure on you as a review committee to put stuff on the ballot. Sometimes it is not important enough to make it to an election. Sometimes it is difficult to word it so everyone understands it and understands it in the same way.

Other Questions: Schrage – The Harborview campus has 40 vehicles sitting there every time I go by, is anyone checking on if we need that many vehicles? Do we have too many vehicles and not enough employees? I cannot speak to how those vehicles are managed on a day-to-day basis. That is a question for Craig Rudy. I can tell you how we review them. We look at mileage, hours – we have a replacement schedule. I would prefer to replace them every five years. I can purchase them under government contract much cheaper than you or I can purchase them When I go to sell them at auction, I get a premium on them because people want government vehicles. Schrage – what is our replacement schedule? Our schedule is every seven years and 80,000 miles, eight years and 60,000 miles or nine years. I still get great value at the auctions but not as much as if I sold them at five years. Five years was our original plan but that is tough politically for the Commissioners to see vehicles turned over that frequently. Our vehicles are low mileage – they are basically rolling toolboxes. Currently, a new addition to the vehicles will be adding GPS to new vehicles – we will be looking at speeding, idling, and sitting. Vehicles are not assigned to employees; they are county owned and used. The only exception is for the Inspectors and employees on call.

End Interview.

IV. Discussion

- a. New language to consider: “in conjunction with the budget process” or “coincide with the budget process”.
- b. Propose change of review of Charter from every six years to every 10-12 years.

V. Adjournment:

MOTION WAS MADE BY CYRIL SCHRAGE, SECONDED BY CHERIE BURNETTE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 11:51 A.M.

MOTION CARRIED 2:0

Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, August 26th at 1:00 p.m.

 Donna Barrett 10/1/21

Donna Barrett, Chairman Date

Administration Staff Sub-Committee