

**Charter Review Commission  
Other Boards and Agencies  
Subcommittee Meeting  
October 11, 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. on October 11, 2021

**Roll Call:**

The following members were present:

Theresa Murtha, Chair

Steve Drake

James Coalwell

Members Absent: Adam Riley

Citizens: None

**Agenda Items:**

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 2:01 PM by Chairman Theresa Murtha.

**Approval of Minutes:** Tabled.

**I. Citizen Input:** None.

**II. Old Business:** None.

**III. New Business:**

a. Preparation of Final Report: Chair Theresa Murtha asked the committee members to review their notes and minutes of the subcommittee over the next several weeks before meeting together again to make recommendations to the Commission from the comments received during the interviews. The committee discussed the possibility of meeting either the 15<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> of November depending upon room availability. Member Steve Drake referred to the excellent report written for this committee during the 2015-2016 Charter Review and suggested we model our report after it. Chair Murtha said she would prepare a draft outline based upon that report for the committee to review. The report will consist of: Introduction, Organizations Interviewed, Meetings Held, Interview Topics and then will attach the Interview Questions as an appendix. The main thing the committee needs to work on are the recommendations; 1) Anything we want to recommend as a change to the Charter, and 2) Recommendations based on our discussions that fall outside of the Charter but that we wish to convey to the Board of County Commissioners.

b. 2:15 p.m. Interview with Patricia Aho, Rotonda West Civic Association

**Introduction:** I am the Rotonda West Civic Association President, but I will be speaking from my personal viewpoint of living in West County and in a large HOA. Rotonda West Association will be celebrating 50 years next year. We began in 1972, having 8,047 lots, making us one of the largest self-

managed HOA's in Florida. Approximately 5600 of the lots are developed into single family residences as well as duplexes and triplexes. We estimate our population in the range of 17,000 to 19,000 if you use the County multiplier of 3.5 people per household. These figures only apply to "the Circle" as there are other Rotunda West Association-like entities, (Rotunda Heights, Lakes, and Sands). We feel we are a large population base that is sometimes forgotten.

**Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators/Commissioners?** I do not believe in term limits. I believe every election is in essence a term limit. If the elected officials are not doing their jobs effectively, they will be voted out of office.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** I think this is an important question. We have approximately 188,000 citizens in the County that equals to each Commissioner having 37,600 citizens. If you would raise it to two more Commissioners that would equal 27,000 citizens. The answer to this question should be driven by our population base in the County. We will be going through re-districting here in the County that may or may not impact the districts of our Commissioners. I think that what the Charter Review Commission (CRC) recommends will change this answer. If the CRC recommends single district Commissioners, then the redistricting would require that the districts be very balanced – with either 5 or 7. The answer is very dependent upon what the CRC recommends.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** Absolutely not. Potential employees may live close to the County line and I would hate to lose excellent candidates for employment to this requirement. In my former employment I told my employees that I did not care where they lived, as long as they did their job effectively.

**Should Constitutional Officers be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners or elected?** The question is unconstitutional as it was decided in Florida at the constitutional level that Constitutional Officers were to be elected in Florida several years ago.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** I support the way we do it now. For it to be an appointed position as Administrator, who serves at the pleasure of the Board.

**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?** I think 10 percent is an extraordinarily high number. If someone outside of the Commission (of 15 members) wishes to propose a change it would require 18,000 signatures. That number should be lowered. It doesn't matter how many propose a change but how that change is enacted (majority or plurality of voters) versus what gets on the ballot. I would reduce the percentage to something more sensible like 5 percent or lower.

**If the State of Florida passes Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County to decide on whether to allow it within the County?** Yes.

**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 am neutral on this question and I do not have an answer nor any recommendations. I believe the Charter should

be neutral for all of its citizens regardless of what they do. I would not change the Charter to recommend one class of citizen over another and what they do.

**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?** This was my first time serving on the one percent sales tax advisory committee. I think I may have been the only person serving from West County. There certainly was an attempt to balance the allocations – parks and recreation or infrastructure but I did not get a sense there was an effort to balance them out based on region. In some cases that made sense as not all regions had the same needs.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** Yes, I do believe that there should be some continuing oversight. We made our priorities and handed them off and that was last we saw of them. It would be nice to have some continuing oversight in that process. **How?** 1) If a high priority project cannot go forward, it would be nice if the advisory committee could weigh in and not leave it up to the county commissioners. 2) If we have a high priority project with funds going to an outside entity, it would be nice to have some oversight to confirm that the agency is spending the money appropriately.

**Should there be a need Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** If the membership is broad (outside current official governance), then I believe it would be valuable.

**Should there be restrictions on the amounts of money raised for financing local campaigns?** No.

**Should there be a minimum age to serve in a local elected position?** No changes recommended.

**Should the county via a referendum or commission vote have a say on any major changes to the airport management? (Currently state law prevails)** I would support a referendum. I would not support the Commission being the sole arbiter of that decision. If it is considered a County Airport then the County should have some say in any change such as ownership, location, etc.

**Should residency requirements to qualify for positions such as commissioner, sheriff, supervisor of elections be longer than the current six months?** No. It goes back to the earlier question regarding residency. The most qualified person may just live over the county line. I would hate to see them move earlier than the six-month requirement.

**Should voting for commissioner be restricted to residents within the district the commissioner represents?** I would like to defer my answer until I can discuss my position with the Charter Review Commission as a whole.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?** 1) Recommend for the Charter Review Commissions of the future – to require members be recruited based on the District in which the member lives – (like the sales tax advisory commission) – there needs to be better balancing. 2) Enforcement mechanism. Who enforces the Charter when there is a breach? Only a few Florida charters refer to an enforcement mechanism.

**Is there anything specific to Rotunda that might be addressed by the Charter?** No. I would ask that there be a balancing of membership on the various Advisory Commissions/Boards to be reflective of the County as a whole. The Charter Review Commission is silent on the matter.

**End Interview:**

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c. 3:00 p.m. Interview with John Welsh, Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association

**Introduction:** I am President of the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association. I have lived in Punta Gorda for 8.5 years. I am a former hospital administrator, nightclub performer, broadcaster, national consultant where I evaluated leaders and made recommendations, (hiring, promotion, termination). I have been involved in the community ever since I moved here.

**Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators/commissioners?** Every legislator should have term limits. Maximum of 3 and no more than 4-year terms. Us older folks bring experience to the job, but we need new, fresh ideas as well as experience at the City, State, and National level.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** Probably okay – if you add more members your meetings will probably last longer than they do now.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** Yes, major people who have a vested interest in running the County should reside in the County.

**Should Constitutional Officers be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners or elected?** I think they are fine being elected.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** Appointed. You don't want someone running the county while trying to get reelected; that may not be in the best interest of the County.

**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?** I would not reduce as it would be too easy to meet the threshold. I also know how hard it is to get qualified signatures so ten percent is about right.

**If the State of Florida passes Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County to decide on whether to allow it within the County?** I hope they never pass gambling and Yes, the County should have a say. I am concerned about Sunseeker, I do not want to see gambling in our County. It brings crime and other issues we don't have now. I would be in favor of a referendum – let the citizens speak whether they want gambling in their community.

**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?** As we already have

a department concerned with business development, I do not see a need to add a requirement to the Charter.

**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 was amazed that the advisory committee was basically ignored after spending a great deal of time choosing the projects. It is broken. I understand the County Staff made the decisions on what to move forward and bring to the County Commissioners. Why bring leaders and citizens into the process if you are going to ignore them? Waste of time for all involved.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** Yes, should be reviewed periodically.

**Should there be a need Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** Good idea. There is a need to formulate plans of where they want to be in five years. To have a vision so that when they allocate funding it matches up to the vision and plans. It is good to have strategic plans. It needs to be a well-run professional process – there are ways to do this that distills it down to the important areas to be focused on. It could be detrimental if not controlled and is not done in a way that is processed to the end result that you want.

**Should there be restrictions on the amounts of money raised for financing local campaigns?** Yes. At the state and national level also. PAC and amount restrictions (stop buying the election), as well as geographical restrictions. People outside the city and county should not be able to influence the election.

**Should there be a minimum age to serve in a local elected position?** Yes. What it is is a subjective point of view. Think back to when you were 18 or 21, could you make good decisions at that time? Maybe 25 or 30 years of age.

**Should the county via a referendum or commission vote have a say on any major changes to the airport management? (Currently state law prevails)** Not within our purview to change.

**Should residency requirements to qualify for positions such as commissioner, sheriff, supervisor of elections be longer than the current six months?** Six months is fine.

**Should voting for commissioner be restricted to residents within the district the commissioner represents?** This is my first experience in having open elections and not district voting. It is nice to have a voice throughout the County – it is just different from what I've seen previously.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?** No, not that I can think of.

**Punta Gorda City Council – Are there any issues such as Charlotte County geographic jurisdiction for water resources that might be addressed by the CRC?** Septic tank issue baffles me as I would think our County residents would like to see our water cleaned up. I would like to see the County and City get together and work this out. Share expenses. This is an

environmental issue and should not be political – we all need to pay and get assistance from the State, if possible.

Punta Gorda is stringent about keeping yards neat and tidy, but not Charlotte County. I would like to see the County look at things like that – some type of compliance by residents, other than code compliance.

**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?** It would be nice but not in our purview. I assume we communicate business development through our County economic development department.

**Water Districts: Do you see a need for desalinization in the future?** Having worked in the Middle East for years I can relate to you that desalinization is extremely expensive to run, and it takes a lot of energy to run. A bottle of water can cost \$8-9 dollars and does not have any flavor.

The County is being run well, as well as Punta Gorda. I am not unhappy with the ways things are being run in the County – could things be done better? Sure, there is always ways to improve and to do things better.

**End Interview:**

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d. 3:45 Interview with Vanessa Oliver, Esq., Airport Authority Board

**Do you think we should introduce Term Limits in the Charter for our Legislators?** I do. I think term limits are a good way of increasing competition and making sure that we get some new blood on board. I think twelve years total is enough time to get the job done you were elected to do. It would give encouragement to the Commissioners to work harder while in office.

**Do you think there should be fewer or more Commissioners on the Board of Commissioners?** I think five is fine. I've seen boards with seven and it gets unwieldy and harder to get things accomplished.

**Should County Department Heads and members of Administration be required to be county residents?** I can see the benefits but with the current labor shortage and housing issues I would hesitate to do anything to reduce the workforce.

**Should Constitutional Officers be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners or elected?** They must be elected under the Florida Constitution, Article Eight, Section One, D.

**Should the County Administrator be appointed or elected?** I have no strong opinion, but I know there are strong proponents for it being elected. I do believe Hector Flores, Administrator, is doing an amazing job.

**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?** I would leave it at ten percent.

**If the State of Florida passes Casino Gambling, should there be a provision in the Charter for allowing Charlotte County to decide on whether to allow it within the County?** Under Article 30 of the Florida Constitution, it states that the electors for the State of Florida will decide through the constitutional amendment procedure. I do not think we could take action as a County that would be constitutional. I do not like putting policy decisions into the governing documents like the Charter, so those policies are best left to the policy makers.

**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, that should not be in the Charter.

**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?** Having never sat on that committee, but having talked with those who have, I feel it is representative of the County and they strive to make it as open as possible so that residents from all parts of the County serve in that advisory role. I think it is as fair and transparent as it can be.

**Should there be a continuing oversight advisory committee dedicated to this tax?** I think that is the job of the County Commissioners, but they deserve to be challenged should projects not move forward as presented.

**Should there be a need Congress or Forum for County Leadership to discuss major long-range planning?** I think it is always good for other groups to be talking together to ensure Charlotte County is moving forward in the same direction. I think it would be great to have a forum to sit down and talk it out. Absolutely.

**Should there be restrictions on the amounts of money raised for financing local campaigns?** No.

**Should there be a minimum age to serve in a local elected position?** No, eighteen is fine.

**Should the county via a referendum or commission vote have a say on any major changes to the airport management? (Currently state law prevails)** The only way I see this happening is if the Airport Commission dissolves or is dissolved (process under Chapter 189 – Independent Special Districts).

**Should residency requirements to qualify for positions such as commissioner, sheriff, supervisor of elections be longer than the current six months?** No and any requirement, even six months, is unconstitutional under the Florida Constitution. You cannot impose any residency requirements for any Constitutional Officers or County Commissioners – this should be removed from the Charter.

**Should voting for commissioner be restricted to residents within the district the commissioner represents?** Absolutely not. I think that you would be incentivizing commissioners to only focus on their district and not on the county as a whole. It is a more cohesive approach to have all Commissioners focusing on all voters.

**Are there any other changes to the County Home Charter that should be considered?** I would ask that we think of ways to bring increased competitiveness to the County Commission races. The last election cycle in 2020 there were three commissioners up for re-election and there was no one to oppose them. For 2018 there might have been a write-in candidate. I think that is a problem and you need to look at ways to increase participation and increase the competitiveness. One idea to consider (because we are a Charter County), is to have Commissioners for three districts, (West, Mid and South County) as well as two at-large. You still will have regional representation which is important but by changing the composition of the Commission, you might get more participation.

**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?** I do not believe anything should be in the Charter, but I would love to see us work cohesively.


**End Interview:**

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**IV. Discussion:**

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

The next meeting is scheduled for the week of November 15<sup>th</sup>.

 11/18/2020  
Theresa Murtha, Chair      Date

Other Boards & Agencies Sub-committee