WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL
Held Wednesday, July 10, 2024

Discussion: Charter Review Imitative

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:30 pm., held in the Council Chambers and via Zoom.

In attendance: Councilmembers Amy E. Knesel (7:31 p.m.) Danielle P. McKinney, Jenni A. Pompi, Rodney M. Roberts (7:31 p.m.), Kristen L.K. Weaver; and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan. Councilmember Silke I. Pope (Travel)

City Staff: Josué Salmerón, City Manager and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Deputy City Clerk.

Others present: Chair, Steven Gilbert and Beth Terry, Board of Elections; Bill Orleans, Michael Hartman and others Ed Fallon, Judith

Greenbelt City Charter Review and Engagement Process

The Greenbelt City Council met to discuss updating the City Charter last reviewed over a decade ago. Mr. Salmerón emphasized the need to incorporate staff and community input and legal compliance updates. Council will reconvene on July 29, 2024 after a two-week break.

Mr. Salmerón indicated that amendments to the City Charter and Code require two public hearings and aim to be finalized by 2025. He did not foresee conflicts with the County or State. There was debate about Council members' roles in the Community Commission with concerns about conflicts of interest but the Council decided to allow their participation in public meetings.

Council discussed forming working groups to review the City Charter and Codes including legal, staff and community members. Mr. Salmerón will seek input from neighboring jurisdictions and Ms. McKinney recommended Maryland Municipal League for best practices. They also suggested involving a Reparations Commission member and creating an application process for business representatives emphasizing need for a transparent review structure.

Ms. McKinney emphasized need for better representation in the City decision-making, particularly from youth, small businesses and the disabled community. Mayor Jordan noted a proposed Charter update stating that the goal was to modify it according to community needs not to rewrite it.

Bill Orleans discussed the issue of charter changes, noting that previous recommendations remained unaddressed. Council invited Beth Terry and Steve Gilbert from the Board of Elections to provide insights on the charter review, particularly regarding Council vacancies and non-citizen voting. The Board of Elections highlighted the necessity for the charter to better align and have clarity with state law. Ms. Terry suggested that Advisory Boards and Committees should be involved earlier and remain separate from Community Commission emphasizing their role in providing feedback based on their expertise.

Council discussed the need for a comprehensive review of the City Charter and Code every ten years. They addressed board and committee representation and decision-making processes. Mr. Roberts raised concerns about some members potentially influencing decisions and advocated for equal voting rights for all board and committee members to ensure a fair, community-driven approach. Council plans to adopt an ordinance to amend the Code and revise the Charter.

Ms. Weaver highlighted the ongoing Charter Review process, emphasizing the timely filling of vacancies and addressing non-citizen voting. She proposed that the legal and staff reviews occur alongside the community committee's input. The Council aims to ensure legal compliance and is open to necessary changes. They also discussed the timing of the legal review and advisory boards' roles in examining specific Charter sections.

Council discussed the timeline for reviewing the City Charter and sought clarity on concurrent reviews and resident feedback on proposed changes. They suggested a work session to refine these proposals, followed by community feedback. Council emphasized the need to respect time constraints and avoid unnecessary sessions, aiming to ensure the Charter is legally compliant and reflects community desires.

Judith Davis proposed changes to the city charter to enhance democracy and community representation. Ed Fallon, a Greenbelt resident, suggested improvements to the democratic process, including allowing non-citizens to vote, increasing resident input in selecting council members, and permitting city employees to form unions. He also called for a more diverse Council and greater resident involvement in decision-making.

Council proposed updating the Charter for broader representation by creating a Charter Review Commission and using best practices from other municipalities. They supported involving advisory boards and emphasized public engagement and their expertise.

Informational Items- Addressing Heat Wave Impact and Preparedness

Council discussed the heat wave's impact with Mr. Salmerón stating they are providing portable air conditioners for 12 affected apartments. They clarified the City emergency response plans and also scheduled meetings with partners to address Fire/EMS issues.

The meeting ended at 9: 09 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shaniya Lashley-Mullen

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Deputy City Clerk