

Willowick Charter Review Commission meeting

5:45 p.m. Thursday, May 2, 2024

Willowick City Hall

Present: Natalie Antosh, Jodi Di Domenico, Keith Beck, Mark Lasmanis, Patrick Mohorcic, Nicole Monaco, Tom Ott, David Phares, Bob Reho.

Old Business

There was no old business

New Business

The commission approved the minutes from its April 11 and April 18 meetings.

Members then examined the three proposed charter changes that emerged in previous meetings and discussed whether to recommend any to City Council. The proposals, in the order of discussion, are as follows:

Article III, The Council

Section 3.3 Qualifications

Currently candidates for council must have lived in the city for one year prior to seeking election. Commission members had debated increasing the residency period to two years but had not arrived at a clear consensus. Nicole Monaco, a proponent, described the current requirement as minimal but suggested leaving it as is. The commission unanimously agreed.

Article III Council

Section 3.1 Number and Term

All council seats, as well as the mayor's office, are currently voted on simultaneously at four-year intervals. Tom Ott said that raised the possibility the entire city government could be changed in a single election and had proposed staggering the terms to ensure continuity and preserve institutional knowledge.

Some commission members said it appeared that terms were staggered in the past, but no one knew the reason that was changed. Bob Reho suggested it might have been to spare the expense Willowick would incur if no other issues were on the ballot. None of the surrounding Lake County cities has staggered terms, except for one that has a separate election for a council member at large.

Ott agreed that mass turnover might be unlikely but added that change in the country's political climate over the years increases the chances. Natalie Antosh said the council's main job is to ensure the city balances its budget. Patrick Mohorcic said city administrators would be in place to maintain continuity in basic functions such as snow plowing and emergency response. Reho and Morhorcic acknowledged that policies set by ordinance might change.

Mohorcic said the goal of maintaining continuity was not a strong enough reason to make a change. He and Natalie Antosh said that the change might be a tough sell and that voters might balk.

If the council agrees to place the proposal on the ballot, the transition could begin after current council members complete their terms in 2027, or after an additional four-year cycle.

The council and law director would draft the transition process, but the commission suggested having candidates for one of the two seats in each ward seek a one-time two-year term. The seat could be that of the incumbent who received the lower vote total in the preceding election. If that method is chosen, Antosh argued for waiting until 2031, saying voters might not have consciously prioritized their two selections in 2023 or even voted for a second candidate. "It changes how you vote," Mohorcic said.

The commission voted 5-4 to recommend the proposal to council. Jodi DiDomenico, Keith Beck, Mark Lasmanis, Nicole Monaco and Ott voted in favor. Reho, Mohorcic, David Phares and Antosh were opposed.

Article III The Council

Sect. 3.15 Effective Date of Ordinances or Resolutions

The charter requires that voters approve any change in zoning. The commission has debated trying to remove that provision, a proposal that voters have rejected at least twice in the past.

Mohorcic, Antosh and Phares have said doing away with so-called referendum zoning would streamline the process and reduce wait time for developers and businesses. They also say that rezoning issues do not automatically go on the ballot in most other Lake County cities. But at the May 2 meeting, they expressed concern that going to the ballot again will further inflame fears that the city wants to rezone Lakefront Lodge. (They added that, to the contrary, the city and Lake Metroparks are taking steps to enhance the Lakefront Lodge site as a park.)

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Several commission members have said they believed the previous efforts failed due to poor communication. Antosh noted that town hall meetings on the issue were sparsely attended.

Mohorcic said the city has not lost opportunities to bring in a major business and would need to "have a story" to persuade voters to delete the provision.

Ott said the city is stagnating and that the story could be what could happen, not what hasn't. He also suggested that Lakefront Lodge, Duddy Park and Manry Park could be exempted from the amendment and remain subject to referendum zoning.

Mark Lasmanis said the city needs to create a "vibe" and that more "malleable" zoning practices could assist.

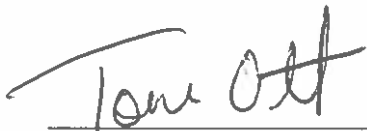
The commission voted 6-3 to recommend that the council ask voters to remove referendum rezoning from the charter. Reho, Jodi Di Domenico, Keith Beck, Lasmanis, Monaco and Ott voted in support. Mohorcic, Antosh and Phares voted no.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:51 p.m.



Commission Chair, Bob Reho

ATTEST:



Secretary, Tom Ott