

## **100513Minutes**

### **Cumberland County Charter Commission, South Portland City Hall, 6:30 pm.**

Members present: Claude Morgan (co-chair), Lisa Villa (co-housing) David Lunt, Steve Gorden, Dick Feeney, Kathleen Babeu, Neil Jamieson, John Eder, Meredith Burgess (late)

Others present: Elizabeth Trice

Note to Claude/Lisa: we need a location for Harrison tomorrow to have the required public notice.

#### **PR Committee & Bill Whitten's Role**

Babeu & Trice report on PR meeting with Babeu, Burgess, Trice, Bill Whitten:

Burgess thought it was important to do an immediate press release and Constant Contact email requesting input, and that public comment should be accepted until the final commission vote in August, and that the public should be encouraged to comment on whether there should be 3, 5 or 7 County Commissioners. A one-page document will be provided at the polls at the June primary, and Babeu encourages members of the public to volunteer to hand out information at the polls. Also, it was suggested that Bill Whitten, as the county's PR person, be the one to send the press releases, and that the county be the media contact.

Gorden: The charter commission has to show that it's totally and distinctly separate from the County Commissioners. When Bill speaks, he speaks for the County Commissioners, not for the Charter Commission.

Jamieson: We will have to join forces for the charter to pass. Certainly Whitten and Burgess can work together.

(Burgess arrives)

Eder: agrees with Gorden; it's important to keep a firewall; we're not an organ of the county.

Morgan: the charter commission passes the charter to the County Commissioners 60 days before the fall election, and disbands 30 days later.

Gorden: Bill has good information that is useful to the commission. Perhaps Bill can work through/with one of the Charter Commissioners.

Feeney: I'm sure Bill could observe a certain neutrality.

Gorden: Concern about Bill is that he has a history, and that colors how he thinks the charter will be received by public. If Bill is going to be neutral, that means he can't use that history.

Morgan: The history may be how people think about their previous relationship with county, and Bill may be the face of that. Not sure why we're thinking so much about this. We have what we need [to do it ourselves]. Nothing prevents us from being apostles, getting the word out, meeting casually or formally, if we choose to advocate for this vote acting as private citizens, not using county money.

Gorden: Nothing keeps us from disbanding sooner than 30 days before the election, and come together as friends of the Cumberland County Charter Commission.

Morgan: Hopes that county staff would still direct questions from press to charter commissioners even after charter commission is disbanded.

Burgess: We've created letterhead that anyone can use. We need to include a schedule of our meetings for the rest of the summer.

Gorden: if we extend public comment, when are we going to do legal review? We have to submit charter to county commissioners by September 2<sup>nd</sup>. We don't meet that often.

Burgess: key issues/hot buttons can be debated through the summer. We can meet whenever we want. Maybe public comment ends August 1<sup>st</sup>. We have 870 email addresses, the press is ready to help us. We'll say "there's been a lot going on in the last year and a half, and here's how you can be part of the process, give them link to the website etc. Babeu has done a lot of work to get volunteers for the primary election.

Whitten's job will be a conduit for information. The media has been frustrated the last few weeks trying to get information from us. We're all busy people during the day.

Whitten is not authorized to speak on behalf of the charter commission, but he can hustle around and say "let me try to get Claude for you, or maybe so and so" or just to get them a link or the one page FAQs. Whitten has some services we can use. It shouldn't cost Cumberland County residents anything to get this stuff done.

Jamieson: I think we need to be done no later than the end of July. I'm not sure how many people are going to come out in the middle of July. I don't think people are going to focus on this until sometime in October. Schedule a couple hearings in July, and that doesn't keep us from finalizing the document in the meantime.

Villa: I'm not comfortable saying "for more information contact Bill Whitten". . .we've carried it for a long time, and to lose perception that in the last 60 days. .maybe Morgan or Gorden can be the contact person. I feel strongly that we need to keep it within our group.

Morgan: We're talking about the Forecaster article, which was well done. She was trying to contact me, and we were trying to figure out among ourselves who she should talk to. She did a great job, but we let this slip. She quoted Bill Whitten because he was the only one who was available during that 9-5 period.

Burgess: we can tell Whitten that he can refer press to Morgan or other commission member.

Feeney: having volunteers at polls may be our best public outreach. We've had no one in attendance at hearings.

Lunt: agree that quotes in press should come from charter commission. Whitten is a reasonable man.

Burgess: I can work with him.

Morgan: there is no "elephant in the room" about Bill; it's just that he's done lots of great work for the county.

Burgess: All Whitten has said to us is "I'll help you" and we'd be crazy to say no to that. Between him and me we can handle it.

Gorden: One of the reporters said they could not get anyone on the commission; I made sure I was available to that person. I think Bill is a great communicator. It's that we want to maintain the perception that we are an independent group that has looked at the government.

Burgess: I think that's obvious. I picture when someone else asks Bill what he thinks; he says "I don't know; that's what the commission decided."

Morgan: Burgess is right that we need one person who agree to be that contact person. If not Bill, someone else would need to step forward. We could also put the reins on Bill and tell him he is not to be available for quotes or even for background information.

Eder: maybe we can make a list of talking points for him.

Burgess: we're preparing all those materials now. Once it's done a lot of this will calm down. I need feedback on this press release tonight, and need to know the date for end of public comment. Group: July 30<sup>th</sup>.

Eder: let's create list of hot button topics to go on website, maybe we can create a survey monkey quiz using our list.

Jamieson: need to emphasize saving towns & counties money, being more efficient

Burgess: Don't say "Changes to charter". There is no charter yet.

Decided: no quotes from Bill, have Bill line up charter commissioners.

### **Scheduling of Summer Meetings**

Morgan: are we ready to start scheduling meetings into July?

Gorden: yes, if this group is ready to meet frequently.

Morgan: are we willing to meet every week? We needn't always be quorumed.

Eder: Can we make these meetings workshops ie suspend house rules about attendance?

\*\*Gorden, Jamieson move to allow suspension of attendance rules, passes unanimous.

Wednesday or Thursday nights are best.

Lunt, Eder, motion to table motion to adopt new redistricting language, passes 8-1  
(Gorden dissents)

Adjourn 8:06.

\*\*BURGESS will drive PR schedule and write releases.

\*\*BURGESS will get materials to Chebeague town meeting June 12

\*\*JAMIESON will find location for Gorham July 15 meeting.

\*\*MORGAN will find location for Brunswick July 8 meeting.

\*\*TRICE will follow up on location for Windham meetings.

\*\*TRICE will check on June 7 5:30 pm workshop with County Commissioners.

\*\*TRICE will reserve courthouse meeting space on August 5 and 19th

\*\*VILLA will confirm Harrison location & send to Burgess, Trice, Buckley tomorrow

\*\*VILLA will find location for June 24 Westbrook meeting.

\*\*VILLA will find location for Raymond July 22 meeting.