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**MINUTES OF THE  
MINNETONKA CHARTER COMMISSION**

**July 21, 2020**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Northrup called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members present: Dick Allendorf, Karen Anderson, John Cheleen, David Larson, John Northrup, Terry Schneider, Linnea Sodergren, LuAnn Tolliver. Wiersum joined the meeting at 6:33 p.m., prior to the approval of the minutes.

3. APPROVE MINUTES OF JULY 14, 2020 MEETING

Northrup suggested a change at page 4, paragraph 5 by adding a clarifying phrase. Schneider moved, Anderson seconded, to approve the minutes of the July 14, 2020 meeting. By roll call vote, all voted in favor.

4. DISCUSS COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND COMMUNITY SURVEY

Northrup asked if there were any comments on the July 14 meeting or the survey. Schneider thought it was important to understand that there was some orchestration going on regarding the comments, which is fine, but it does weigh that end of the spectrum a little bit for the people who are trying to learn about this and have a dialogue. The city has used the community survey for a number of years. He gives it a lot of credibility, and he was surprised by the level of recognition of ranked choice voting reflected in the survey. His caveat would be that, because there is a history of community support for the council and the city, he believes that the fact that the council supported looking at ranked choice voting might have influenced the survey.

Allendorf said he had noted a number of misconceptions in the public comments. It was quoted from the previous meeting that rank choice voting will save the city money, but it will cost between \$60,000-\$120,000 more. Ranked choice voting is claimed to be more fair and just, but only three cities have adopted ranked choice voting. He has not seen research to support the claim that it helps marginalized communities, but he doesn't see how it works. The research on increased voter turnout is mixed and 43% was one year in Minneapolis where other issues played a major part in that turnout rate. With respect to promoting diversity, he noted that the city council has four women and a woman of

color with the current system. Allendorf expressed concern that FairVote has been working on ranked choice voting for two years and the commission has been asked to put the issue on the ballot less than four months from now. Allendorf thinks it deserves more time than four months for a change in the city charter.

Sodergren stated that four months may be a good time frame to educate the voters. Where ranked choice voting falls down is the cost. Voter education efforts would be critical if this is moved forward. The estimate for voter education was \$25,000 and she doesn't know where the city budget would accommodate that. She wondered how people would respond to various options for property tax increases to be used for items such as not laying off staff or cutting services, or paying for voter education. People should know that it will cost money. The public comments didn't indicate that people were aware that it would cost more money.

Anderson wanted to comment on community feedback outside and above of what occurred at the July 14 meeting. The commission has received lots of letters and emails from people in the community, which are open to the public to read. Several emails have come from everyactionadvocacy.com. That is a service from Washington, D.C. that is used to lobby public officials. One resident indicated that an email had been sent from that address using her email, and she knew nothing about it. Another resident had expressed concern that when he went to the FairVote website, the only way to get information was to express support for RCV. She was also concerned about amending the city charter without a single public forum where people could appear in a public setting to provide their input.

Larson said there were two individuals who spoke about the downsides of RCV. He felt their points were well taken. RCV is not better than the system the city has. He is concerned about exhausted ballots and votes not counting. He thinks there should be more time in terms of educating the public. St. Louis Park did not even take its ordinance to the public. He thinks it would be better to use RCV on a municipal election ballot rather than the state general election. He is concerned about a well-financed group advocating in favor of the amendment without an equal opportunity to hear opposing views.

Cheleen kept track of all the pros and cons in the public comments. If you take out all of the form letters, and look at people who have dug into the issue, the pros and cons are nearly evenly split. He's concerned about putting the issue on the ballot in November because there are a lot of other issues there. He's concerned that if the city puts it on the ballot, voters might approve without a lot of thought. He would like to see the issue on a municipal election year, because those voters are interested in municipal issues. He would like to recommend that the council put it on the ballot when it would have more of a municipal focus.

Tolliver is concerned about the time for educating voters and concerned about the senior population. Older people do not all use social media, and she is concerned about how they will get the information without the ability for in-person meetings. She is also concerned about ongoing costs for RCV. The council needs to prioritize costs. If a cost is added, something else has to be cut. The city can't continue to increase costs.

Schneider also looked at the issues. Negative campaigning and partisan gridlock are not problems that Minnetonka has. The claim about having a clear majority has been debunked because with regular voting you have a clear majority unless there's a tie and with RCV the winner may not have a majority of all votes cast due to exhausted ballots. FairVote has an organized passionate following, but the city will have to be neutral in educating the voters. That will be challenging to do in four months, especially during the pandemic. It may be true that more candidates will file, because FairVote will encourage candidates to get out. Historically, there have been only five times when there was at least one person running unopposed. Some might say that's proof that the system is rigged, and people aren't running against candidates that should be run against. His view is that the voters have regularly said they like stability and consistency and that so long as the council does a good job, they'll be re-elected. The real issue is to say, what is the right thing to do now? The commission's duty is to thoughtfully review this. If that means continuing it for 90 days in order to get further input, the commission should get as much resident input as possible.

Wiersum started with the community survey. He was surprised by the strength of support for RCV. He thought David Haeg did a nice job of explaining how he got involved with RCV. The survey showed how strongly people feel about the city and about how well it is run. FairVote is a national organization that is targeting charter cities that have their elections in odd-numbered years. There aren't many of those cities. He was appointed to the city council, but he wasn't well known or a local favorite. The argument that it will save money does not hold water. The voter education costs should not be totally allocated to RCV. Even without RCV, an investment could be made in voter outreach to improve civic engagement. New ways of voting and new ways of communicating work against senior voters. Seniors have less access to the various media, and they are at a disadvantage in a time of pandemic in getting information.

Northrup pointed out that the *Minnetonka Memo* is the primary communication vehicle for residents. All other media were at 12% or less in the survey. When you think about educating the public, there needs to be time to get pros and cons in the *Memo*. Absentee ballots become available Sept. 18, which means there is only a month and a half to communicate to residents.

**5. DISCUSS CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION**

Schneider said he had made his point that voters may be saying they like stability. Anderson said that during her years on the council she saw several years where there was no change at all and then years when there was great upheaval and change. She was concerned about the lack of women on the council for many years. Then there were three women on the council. The balance of women and men went back and forth. Now the council has a majority of women and a person of color. Minnetonka has shown a great deal of progressivity on a number of things. She isn't sure that changing the system of voting would be an advantage.

Schneider noted that a potential benefit could have been the idea of getting more people involved and getting more perspective. Having diversity is an important part of a healthy council. He thinks community discussion is the best way to get different perspectives into the decision-making process.

Allendorf said that what the commission needs to do is to lay out a well-thought out plan of communication. Four months is too short a time to do that, and the education needs to come before residents vote on it.

**6. DISCUSS COMMISSION ACTION AND NEXT STEPS**

Northrup noted that the commission's charge was to study RCV and provide a thoughtful and complete report to the council. He asked Larson to provide his perspective.

Larson said Minnetonka has good gender balance on the council. RCV is just another way of counting ballots. It is not appropriate to put something on the ballot because there is a strong lobbying group. It doesn't make sense to do this at this time, with the pandemic. RCV doesn't get you to a true majority. It doesn't make sense for the Minnetonka community. He believes the disadvantages of RCV outweigh the perceived advantages.

Northrup noted that the city has a proven system that reliably counts the votes. He thinks it is going backward to go to manual spreadsheets. David Maeda said there is no certified equipment to automate ballot counting. He is concerned about the city budget at a time when revenue is going to be shrinking.

In terms of next steps, the commission needs to decide whether it wants to extend the review period or make a report to the council.

Schneider said the question is whether RCV should be presented to the voters in this accelerated time frame. Voters should have the ability to vote on it, but it should not be

done in a rushed fashion. Two choices are either to give a summary memo or tell the council that more time is needed. The next 90 days should be spent on summarizing pros and cons and laying out a process to make sure it is handled right. He would like commission to make a more informed and more thought out recommendation to the city council.

Anderson said she generally agrees. She thinks there is danger in that approach in terms of kicking the can down the road. It gives the lobbying effort another year, too. Her thought is that the council is under a great deal of pressure and she would like to add to the recommendation that if the issue goes on the ballot in November, it is important and necessary that the council do a number of things.

Schneider asked the city attorney to clarify what the extension of time would mean. Heine stated that the council cannot take action until the commission completes its review. If the review period is extended, the issue cannot go on the November 2020 ballot.

Allendorf agrees with Schneider and thinks that the citizens and the council have a right to know what the commission intends to study. Part of the resolution should state that the commission wants to study the academic writings and a plan for communication.

Wiersum said the commission needs to be clear about what it will do with the extra 90 days. Proponents might see the extension as a ploy to keep it off the 2020 ballot. With the pandemic still in place, what will the commission do with that time?

Northrup said there was a lot of discussion about community engagement. That was a troubling aspect of the meeting last week. He wasn't sure the commission succeeded in reaching seniors.

Sodergren said that when she looked at the number of people who commented, she was struck with the number of people who said they had lived in the city many years. She isn't concerned that seniors weren't being reached. She trusts that the communications staff will know how to reach seniors.

Schneider said the direction to staff should be to prepare a resolution with reasons for the extension. He would like to see a work session with council. He suggested that commissioners could send their proposed reasons to the attorney to include in the resolution.

Anderson said the commission needs to develop a robust communication plan. The commission needs time to list out the factual advantages and disadvantages of ranked choice voting in the studies received and testimony received. She would like to discuss and look at the issue of exhausted ballots as well as issues surrounding the tabulation of votes. She is concerned with the results not being clearly understood by the public

and whether RCV will make voting transparent enough. She would like more information on the politicization of ranked choice voting. She stressed the need for a public forum and events. She would like to look at the budget issues surrounding RCV.

Wiersum said that how we vote and the sanctity of the vote is very important. Being careful is part of the rationale. The commission wants to be well informed and have a good debate of the pros and cons.

Anderson seconded what Wiersum said. One of the most important aspects of voting is that people in the community trust the system. Some people don't trust the system. Will going to RCV throw off the trust in the community? She'd like to have a full public discussion.

Allendorf said that as he looked at last week's meeting, a public forum did not truly happen in the last meeting. The commission should have two or three different forums. The lobbying group had people lined up to besiege the commission. A professor could give the pros and cons and experiences at a public forum. He would like to define the public input so that one viewpoint does not dominate and instead there is give-and-take.

Wiersum said he would like to see an intelligent debate of both sides of the issue. That would be valuable and would enable people to make a great decision.

Schneider mentioned that the council will have months to work on the issue. There is a better chance of making the discussion more robust rather than less robust.

Heine asked for an idea of the proposed schedule. Schneider said the commission needs time to lay out a work plan.

## 7. ADJOURNMENT

Anderson moved, seconded, to adjourn the meeting. By roll call voted, all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

LuAnn Tolliver  
Secretary