

**Whatcom County
Charter Review Commission
Meeting Minutes**

February 15, 1995

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Courthouse Basement Multi-purpose Room, Bellingham by Chairperson Sutter.

II. Roll Call

Present:

Keith Ahrens
Danna Beech
Joe Elenbaas (arrived late)
Karen Frederick
Georgia Gardner
Yvonne Goldsmith
Don Hansey (arrived late)
Darlene McLeod
Ray Radke
Mary Scrimsher
Orphalee Smith
Mary Stender
Kathy Sutter
Terry Unger

Absent, but excused:

Ron Polinder

III. Reading and Approval of Minutes from the February 8, 1995 Meeting

Recording Secretary Kerstin M. Bailey read the minutes into the record.

Don Hansey and Joe Elenbaas arrived at this point in the meeting.

Smith moved to approve of the minutes as presented.

Frederick seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Open Session - Public Comments

The Chair opened the floor for open session.

Speakers:

Barbara Cory, County Treasurer
Shirley Forslof, County Auditor
Mary Cutbill, 4017 Willowbrook Lane
Thomas Sutberry, Director of Administrative Services

The Chair closed open session.

V. Discussion of Article III - Focus: "Role of the County Executive"

Stender moved to create a subcommittee of people who would be willing to go out and get information in the next week and bring it back and make a report to this Commission about what's going on in other communities and how different options have worked.

Bob Woods provided some information.

McLeod seconded the motion.

Motion failed by a majority.

Unger moved that the Chair take two straw votes, one to determine if the Commission favors a split council/executive format as opposed to a commissioner format, the other to determine if the Commission favors an elected Executive or an appointed, hired manager.

Elenbaas seconded the motion.

Motion carried 13 - 1, with Frederick opposed.

Straw vote #1: Combined, commission governmental form: 3
(Ahrens, Beech, and Unger)
VS.
Separate, county/executive governmental form: 10

Frederick abstained.

Straw vote #2: Appointed Manager: 7
VS.
Elected Executive: 6
(Elenbaas, Gardner, McLeod, Stender, Sutter, and Unger)

Frederick abstained.

The Chair called for a five minute break at 8:10 p.m.

At 8:15 p.m., the Chair reconvened the meeting.

The Chair allowed department heads of the County to discuss their roles.

County Sheriff Dale Brandland:

- considers himself a public safety advocate, a role in which he needs to speak his mind
- believes that being appointed by the Executive would prevent him from speaking his mind, therefore he thinks that his position should be elected, not appointed
- would prefer five exempt positions, not just two.

County Assessor Keith Willnauer:

- thinks that his position should be elected, because no assessor in Washington is appointed, because his responsibility includes working for other tax districts, not just for the County (so to be appointed by a County employee may put him in two conflicting roles), because the people really want control over the person who determines their property assessment, and because no one else would want to take on that responsibility.

County Treasurer Barbara Cory

- thinks that her position should remain elected, because the Treasurer is required to serve as the treasurer for other districts. The job is not just with the County, therefore the position should not be appointed within the County
- would prefer three exempt positions, not just two.

County Auditor, Shirley Forslof

- thinks that her position should remain elected, because her office provides direct service to the public, because if she was appointed, she may have to do an internal audit of the person who appointed her, because 38 out of 39 Auditors are elected (King County being the exception), and because she does accounting for the districts, not just the County.
- noted that the Sheriff, Assessor, Treasurer, and Auditor work really well together.

Jeff Monsen, County Director of Public Works
-noted that he can be held accountable when elected officials give clear instructions;
he doesn't need more money, just better direction

Stender moved to keep the County Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer, and Sheriff as
elected positions.

Goldsmith seconded the motion.

Beech moved to add "conceptually" to the motion.

Motion to amend carried by a majority.

Main motion, as amended, carried 13 - 1, with Hansey opposed.

VI. Other Business

The Commission discussed procedural issues regarding motions.

The Commission made suggestions for the minutes.

Ahrens recommended that the Commission's business be limited at town hall
meetings.

Hansey recommended that individuals who speak at open session have a set place
to speak and that only one person address the Commission at a time.

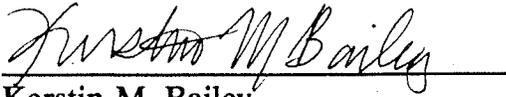
VII. Discussion of Next Agenda

Next week's agenda will be similar to this week's.

VIII. Adjourn

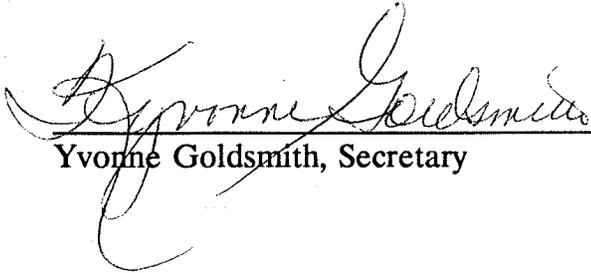
The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m. by the Chair.

Respectfully submitted,

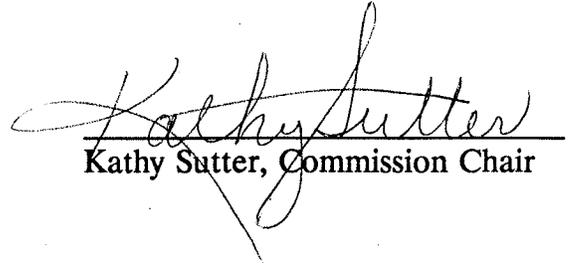


Kerstin M. Bailey
Recording Secretary

WHATCOM COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION



Yvonne Goldsmith, Secretary



Kathy Sutter, Commission Chair

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
Speakers at February 15, 1995 Meeting

1. **Barbara Cory, County Treasurer**
The public complains about the County not communicating about what is going on. Her recommendation is that the Commission add, under 3.22 of the Charter, item C, the requirement of an annual report to be presented to the citizens of the County. (either by mailing or just to libraries and companies)
2. **Shirley Forslof, County Auditor**
proposed language addition to the Charter, Section 1.50: "PERFORMANCE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING" (See handout.)
3. **Mary Cutbill, 4017 Willowbrook Lane**
She would like actual public comments put into the minutes.
She would like the Commission to consider making the Executive an appointed position, as opposed to elected, with the emphasis on getting someone who has business management skills, personnel management skills, and a thorough background of what kind of grants are available through the State that we could make use of in Whatcom County.
In regard to Boards and Commissions, she would like some language included in the Charter that sets a deadline by which the decisions of appointments must be made.
4. **Thomas Sutberry, County Administrative Services Director**
The current Executive/Council form of government is faulty.
He doesn't think we need to create the level of conflict and tension that currently exists. Policy-making and administration need to be pulled together. Our current system is 19th century, before we had good internal controls. It allows every elected official to look over the shoulder of the other elected officials.
He recommends that we eliminate a number of elected officials, in the Executive branch especially. He believes that we need an appointed administrator, since we're running an \$80 million corporation in Whatcom County. We can't assume that a person elected by the citizenry has the skills necessary to run this government. We also can't assume that that person is going to want to work cooperatively with all the other government officials. You want more efficiency and effectiveness, not more conflict. He thinks that the Auditor, Assessor, Treasurer, and Sheriff should all be appointed, because the jobs are all technical. It will give more accountability, instead of finger-pointed. The executive should take direction from the Council; the four line officials should take direction from the executive.
One major problem is that there is no larger vision, because each elected official looks at their own fiefdom and turf issues. We definitely need strategic planning. He thinks that continuation of the Charter is crucial; it allows us to operate independently and more efficiently.
The County needs a leadership development mechanism, giving people the opportunity to get experience. He recommends an elected Citizens' Commission, to review budget and operational issues. The members would get experience, and you'd need less Council Members.
He thinks that it's crucial that the Charter specifically allow the County to get independent legal advice, either for the Council or the Executive.