

1 CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

2 PUBLIC FORUM #1

3 FEBRUARY 11, 2019

4 CITY OF COLLEGE PARK  
5 CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
6 4500 KNOX ROAD  
7 COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740

8 PRESENT:

9 CHAIR CAMERON THURSTON; COMMISSIONERS BROOKS BOLIEK, DAN ALPERT, JOHN KROUSE,  
10 NATHAN RICKARD, NORA EIDELMAN, NORMAND BERNACHE, PETER KING, RAY RANKER.

11 ABSENT:

12 VIRDINA GIBBS

13 ALSO PRESENT:

14 JANEEN S. MILLER, CITY CLERK, STAFF LIAISON TO THE COMMISSION

15 TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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19 MR. THURSTON: Now at this time we will open up to  
20 public comments. Any attendee that wishes to speak this evening  
21 should have signed in at the table. Each speaker will be given  
22 3 minutes. And each speaker is asked to state their name and  
23 residing neighborhood prior to giving public comments.  
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25 I will begin by having David Gray in the queue and I  
26 will give the floor to Carol Nezzo. Please come to the podium  
27 for your public comments.  
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CRC PUBLIC FORUM, FEBRUARY 11, 2019

1 MS. CAROL NEZZO: "Hello. I'm here in a bubble. I  
2 appreciate very much being able to be here and talk about my  
3 opinions without feeling that there is going to be violence when  
4 I go out, that we are in danger. We are all here in a bubble.  
5 Some people call this a shell. We are very privileged. We are  
6 very protective. My comments will have to do with using this  
7 protection that we have. We have a responsibility to use it for  
8 the best of our city. My stand is that we keep the charter as  
9 it is written. 2 year terms for the council people and mayor and  
10 2 council members per district. If we propose to change it,  
11 then we must have a referendum and ask people in the community  
12 what their opinion is. And a referendum should be added to the  
13 ballot in November. We are going to have an election and it  
14 won't cost us any extra money much. So no extra voting, just  
15 add the referendum to the ballot in November. I want to give my  
16 reasons why I want to keep the charter the way it is. The  
17 number of years, of course, the numbers, that is not the point,  
18 2, 4, 5, 10. We need to look at our culture around us and what  
19 it is we can do to include people because our government is  
20 supposed to be and we hope it is, and we want it to be even  
21 better for the people, by the people, for everyone because we  
22 need people's skills, we need people's ideas. We are in a  
23 crucial time and we need to do that. The Federal Government has  
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1 difficulty with citizens united that actually influences county  
2 and local government too. I've been working within the state to  
3 have an element to get rid of citizens united. And the county  
4 now has fair election fund and that is also going towards  
5 democracy. Now we as a city need to use our responsibility, to  
6 use our privilege the best way we can to encourage citizens to  
7 step up to the plate, to be engaged and I believe that every 2  
8 years elections is the best way. There are other ways too that  
9 we have to look into. It's not just having 2 year terms. Fair  
10 election fund would be a good thing for our city to have. Just  
11 as the county has voted to have a fair election fund. So I ask  
12 you to think about the environment we live in where people don't  
13 really trust governments whether it's federal, state, county or  
14 local governments and people don't involve themselves. Thank  
15 you."

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19 MR. BERNACHE: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, can we ask the  
20 lady to provide her name for the record and neighborhood so we  
21 all know.

22 MS. NEZZO: "My name is Carol Nezzo and I live in  
23 Calvert Hills.

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25 MR. THURSTON: Thank you. I have David Dorsch in the  
26 queue and I'd like to give David Gray the floor.

1 MR. DAVID GRAY: "My name is David Gray and I live in  
2 Yarrow. I'm against this. I think 4 year terms is an absurd  
3 concept. This is, city council is freshmen politics. Basically  
4 this is where people start their careers. 4 year terms will  
5 just scare off people because they can't make a 4 year  
6 commitment. People do not know what they will be doing in 4  
7 years. Federal workers aren't getting paid on a regular basis  
8 now. No one has certainty where their lives are going to be in  
9 4 years unless you are really well off or retired. So the only  
10 people who think they are going to run for 4 year terms, are  
11 people who you know are extremely wealthy, or retired, or set  
12 in life. That discourages people from the community from  
13 participating in this system. And if you know conversely if  
14 they do something that comes up in their life, they may have to  
15 leave. And so we will have empty vacancies on the council and  
16 have to have special elections for that. This has basically  
17 developed by the Mayor as a problem that doesn't exist. The  
18 city has worked functioned perfectly well for decades and  
19 decades with 2 year terms. There is no compelling reason at all  
20 to change the current system. He uses the example of Rockville  
21 and all the great things they have done there. Rockville is a  
22 vastly different city than ours. They are vastly wealthier.  
23 They have a normal demographic. They don't have a huge student  
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1 population coming in and out. And they also have all their  
2 seats are all at large. We have large disparity between good  
3 participation in each council, sorry each district. So  
4 Districts 2 and 4 have much smaller voter turnouts than  
5 Districts 1 and 3. And this is basically you are having you  
6 know 25% of the electorate of the vote being cast determining  
7 half the seats on the council. You know this is, this is all  
8 basically done as a form of compression against students so they  
9 can't influence city affairs. 4 year terms don't serve any  
10 problems from the standpoint and the Mayor basically said oh  
11 well we got these people, new people come on and nobody knows  
12 what to do and it slows things down. The city has done great  
13 things with 2 year terms. All the things we have done with 2  
14 year terms. The Hotel, this, that, whatever, everything done  
15 with 2 year terms. And that most people who run for council as  
16 incumbents win. Only 6 incumbents in the last 10 elections were  
17 defeated by new comers, only 6 incumbents were defeated. So  
18 people you know do an alright job. They'll do fine. Most  
19 people will leave the council because they don't want to be on  
20 the council anymore. Because their lives have changed. They  
21 don't like it. They don't like people who are on the council.  
22 Maybe It's not a very fun job. It doesn't pay very good. You  
23 have to deal with the public. And there is all sorts of  
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1 headaches. So maybe the fun goes away after a couple years.  
2 Conversely you have had only 4 people who have represented  
3 District 2 for the last 20 years. That's almost House of Lords  
4 level of you know of longevity. Conversely 2 year terms give a  
5 manor of control for the public. If people do a good job, they  
6 can do it and they will be re-elected. Certainly 4 year terms  
7 says I don't want to be responsible to the public. That the  
8 Mayor is basically saying on that broach rag that I have to  
9 respond to people saying you are doing a good job or not. "

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12 MR. THURSTON: Thank you. I have Mary Cook in the  
13 queue and I'd like to give the floor to David Dorsch.

14 MR. DAVID DORSCH: "Hi David Dorsch, 4607 Calvert  
15 Road. Yes I'm a citizen of College Park just over 45 years. In  
16 fact I'm just looking at the pictures on the wall. I've been  
17 here through half of those people who are up there. So when you  
18 look at council positions, Mayor positions, one of the things  
19 this commission I think was supposed to do is to tell us the  
20 pros and the cons of making this change will do. And I haven't  
21 heard anything from the commission on what the pros and cons  
22 might be. You guys might do that later. I don't know. What's  
23 the purpose of the mayor and the council is to represent their  
24 citizens to form this governmental body here and if you do what  
25 your citizens want you to do, then generally, if you want to  
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1 continue on the council, you do so. And I'm just mention Jack  
2 Parry as one of the people. Monroe Dennis currently serving  
3 here. I forget how many terms he's been on here. So these  
4 people, they have an interest, they want to do it. Fine, but  
5 the main thing is they represent their constituents. They come  
6 forward with what their constituents want. And this is basically  
7 what the function of these council members is supposed to be.  
8 Unlike the federal government where we have some lifetime  
9 members. Ah, the federal government was never really set up to  
10 be a lifetime thing. It was for the citizens to come in, serve  
11 their government for a period of time and then go back and do  
12 what they were doing just like what George Washington did. I  
13 don't see any need to change this term limit or number. We have  
14 been very successful with the way this government has been set  
15 up for the 40 or 45 years that I have been here. It works well.  
16 Maybe we could get some more people interested in the council  
17 positions or running for them. I don't think we should change.  
18 I think we should leave it exactly where it is. Thanks."

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22 MR. THURSTON: I have Mark Schroder in the queue and  
23 I'd like to give the floor to Mary Cook.

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25 MS. MARY COOK: "Thank you for listening to me  
26 tonight. I'm Mary Cook. I live up in Cherry Hill. I live in a  
27 lovely neighborhood. I have a question for you before you  
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1 start. If I speak tonight, will I still be allowed to speak at  
2 Davis."

3 MR. THURSTON: Yes.

4 MS. COOK: "Ok, I had that question addressed to me  
5 and I wanted to know the answer. Thank you very much. I don't  
6 have a lot to add from my friends to the south here. I want to  
7 speak from personal experience as being a council member and  
8 having run for mayor. Last time that I was in office a couple  
9 years, I heard that was when this idea was first brought up.  
10 There was a lot of grumbling. I have to go out and campaign  
11 every 2 years. Yeah, so. That's what you should do. You have to  
12 go and talk to the people every 2 years. I have to honestly say  
13 I don't see my councilmembers in my neighborhood. So I believe,  
14 this is just ridiculous that people should be elected every 4  
15 years. Another complaint that the council members had is oh the  
16 learning curve. Yes there is a learning curve. But you know  
17 what first get involved in the city. Get involved with some  
18 committees and you won't have such a big learning curve. As  
19 these gentlemen rightly said, think about Jack Parry, think  
20 about Bob Catlin, think about these people who have been on the  
21 council for years and years. Yes it is a little bit trying in  
22 the first year, but you know what, you can catch up. Another  
23 grumbling I heard, you have to go out and raise funds every 2  
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1 years. Be real, this is College Park. You don't have to go out  
2 and raise that many funds. I think the mayoral race is getting  
3 a bit ridiculous, but at the council level, it is positively  
4 doable. I don't think that is any reason to change to 4 year  
5 terms. You also address the topic of whether or not we should  
6 have stagger the concurrent terms. I believe that concurrent  
7 terms are the best way to go. It's most effective and most cost  
8 effective and the most efficient. It doesn't make any sense to  
9 have our staff running elections every other year or every 2  
10 years. And finally as Ms. Nezzo brought up, we need to take  
11 this to referendum. Thank you for your time."

14 MR. THURSTON: I'd like to give the floor to Mark  
15 Schroder.

16 MR. MARK SHRODER: "Good evening ladies and gentleman.  
17 I'm Mark Shroder and the neighborhood I live in is Hollywood. I  
18 want to second nearly everything Mr. Gray said from a slightly  
19 different perspective. In my considered opinion the council has  
20 asked you the wrong question. The question they should have  
21 asked you is how can we design a College Park election system  
22 that better represents the people of College Park. And it is  
23 frankly not a secret that the College Park election system is  
24 set up to minimize the representation of students. It is set up  
25 that way because most of us who are homeowners are concerned  
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1 that excessive student representation in the city would lead to  
2 instability in our city government. That's understandable.  
3 Let's try and come up with a structure that allows students to  
4 be represented fairly in this city where they pay almost all of  
5 their taxes and are not subject to the ordinance. Well, I think  
6 it can be done. I think you could have a real student seat in  
7 the City of College Park, draw the lines properly, um, but just  
8 have that student be representing his or her constituents for  
9 one year. A student can't really make a commitment for longer  
10 than that. We can have an election every year for the student  
11 seat. What would we do with the other seats? Well for one  
12 thing we will have a second district and a fourth district that  
13 have got bites taken out of them in their current form. And  
14 maybe they should be expanded into the third district and first  
15 district where the people of those districts are currently very,  
16 very under-represented. There are many elections where the  
17 first district had more than half the voters, people who  
18 actually turned out and got one quarter of the council. Not  
19 right. As for the matter of where experienced council members  
20 are better than inexperienced council members, I would say  
21 probably a little bit. However, I would have to mark that some  
22 of the major misadventures of the City in the time that I have  
23 lived here, which included turning a pension system over to the  
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1 state, for no particular good reason so far as the tax payers  
2 are concerned. That was made with the council that had plenty of  
3 experience. Thank you."

4 MR. ROBERT SWANSON: "Hi I am Robert Swanson and I live  
5 in Old Town on Howard Lane. I didn't hear the conversation; I  
6 came in a little late. But what I wanted to know if whether or  
7 not, should you decide to have 4 year elections, will there be a  
8 recall procedure for these council people? Perhaps they don't  
9 do anything and they just sit there and sitting out a 4 year  
10 term. They do that and you know they don't do anything. I  
11 seconded all of what everyone says here, you know, 2 year  
12 election. I think they are preferable to the 4 year. There are  
13 a lot of advantages and the disadvantages have been overplayed.  
14 Thank you."

15 MS. CAROL POOR: "My name is Carol Poor. I am now a  
16 resident of Howard Lane in Old Town. Before that, lived in  
17 Autoville Drive. I've been here a number of years. I don't  
18 want to say how many to give my age away. Listening to this and  
19 not having heard a lot of discussion and looking at the council  
20 and looking at the city through the years, I would say that 2  
21 year terms are the ideal. Economically it makes the same sense.  
22 If you had 4 year terms, you would certainly want, there would  
23 be no way you should ever do a 4 year term if you didn't have  
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1 those intervals so that you would 2 - you get my drift,  
2 overlapping. Economically it doesn't make any sense. But as  
3 long as we have no term limits on our city government, on our  
4 council members or mayor, I think the current system is  
5 admirable and makes more sense than option that I have heard of  
6 yet. Thank you."

8 MR. THURSTON: You can post your comments online  
9 through the city website.

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12 THE PUBLIC FORUM CONCLUDED AT 7:57 P.M.

13 PREPARED BY SHERYL DEWALT, CONTRACT SECRETARY  
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