CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION  
PUBLIC FORUM #1  
FEBRUARY 11, 2019  
CITY OF COLLEGE PARK  
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
4500 KNOX ROAD  
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740  

PRESENT:  
CHAIR CAMERON THURSTON; COMMISSIONERS BROOKS BOLIEK, DAN ALPERT, JOHN KROUSE, NATHAN RICKARD, NORA EIDELMAN, NORMAND BERNACHE, PETER KING, RAY RANKER.  
ABSENT:  
VIRDINA GIBBS  
ALSO PRESENT:  
JANEEN S. MILLER, CITY CLERK, STAFF LIAISON TO THE COMMISSION  

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS  

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MR. THURSTON: Now at this time we will open up to public comments. Any attendee that wishes to speak this evening should have signed in at the table. Each speaker will be given 3 minutes. And each speaker is asked to state their name and residing neighborhood prior to giving public comments.  

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

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

MS. NEZZO: “My name is Carol Nezzo and I live in Calvert Hills.

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

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

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

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

MS. MARY COOK: “Thank you for listening to me tonight. I’m Mary Cook. I live up in Cherry Hill. I live in a lovely neighborhood. I have a question for you before you
start. If I speak tonight, will I still be allowed to speak at Davis.”

MR. THURSTON: Yes.

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

MR. THURSTON: I’d like to give the floor to Mark Schroder.

MR. MARK SHRODER: “Good evening ladies and gentleman. I’m Mark Shroder and the neighborhood I live in is Hollywood. I want to second nearly everything Mr. Gray said from a slightly different perspective. In my considered opinion the council has asked you the wrong question. The question they should have asked you is how can we design a College Park election system that better represents the people of College Park. And it is frankly not a secret that the College Park election system is set up to minimize the representation of students. It is set up that way because most of us who are homeowners are concerned
that excessive student representation in the city would lead to instability in our city government. That’s understandable.

Let’s try and come up with a structure that allows students to be represented fairly in this city where they pay almost all of their taxes and are not subject to the ordinance. Well, I think it can be done. I think you could have a real student seat in the City of College Park, draw the lines properly, um, but just have that student be representing his or her constituents for one year. A student can’t really make a commitment for longer than that. We can have an election every year for the student seat. What would we do with the other seats? Well for one thing we will have a second district and a fourth district that have got bites taken out of them in their current form. And maybe they should be expanded into the third district and first district where the people of those districts are currently very, very under-represented. There are many elections where the first district had more than half the voters, people who actually turned out and got one quarter of the council. Not right. As for the matter of where experienced council members are better than inexperienced council members, I would say probably a little bit. However, I would have to mark that some of the major misadventures of the City in the time that I have lived here, which included turning a pension system over to the

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state, for no particular good reason so far as the tax payers are concerned. That was made with the council that had plenty of experience. Thank you.”

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

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

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

THE PUBLIC FORUM CONCLUDED AT 7:57 P.M.
PREPARED BY SHERYL DEWALT, CONTRACT SECRETARY