

1 CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
2 PUBLIC FORUM #2
3 MARCH 11, 2019 - 7:30 PM
4 DAVIS HALL
5 9217 51ST AVENUE
6 COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740

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8 PRESENT:

9 Cameron Thurston, Chair, District 2
10 Dan Alpert, District 2
11 Peter King, District 4
12 John Krouse, District 1
13 Nathan Rickard, District 1
14 Nora Eidelman, District 1
15 Virdina Gibbs, Calvert Hills
16 Norman Bernache, District 4

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18 ABSENT:

19 Brooks Boliek, District 2

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21 ALSO PRESENT:

22 Janeen S. Miller, City Clerk, Staff Liaison to the Commission

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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LES BOOTH: Daniels Park. I am against the extension of the term limits to 4 years. That um, I don't think it's necessary. Two years is plenty for us to figure out if somebody is going to be worthwhile or not and see if we want other people in there. I would even consider it if something would be put in there to give us an opportunity to recall a candidate or somebody that we deem unfit during the course. Thank you.

CHRISTINE NAGLE: Thank you Chair Thurston and members of the commission. My name is Christine Nagle and I live in Daniels Park Community. I'd like to thank you all for accepting the City's charge to come with pros and cons regarding the four-year

1 terms and staggered times in City Council and for your time tonight. I feel that four-year terms
2 could be beneficial. As someone who served on the City Council I do know that it takes a new
3 member at least a year to come up to full speed on city affairs. And additionally, all council
4 members in that second term year are thinking about election which is very disruptive to council
5 business. There is a potential for the council to vote more cohesively and to be more collegial if
6 they know they are going to be working together for a four-year period. I also see that a four-
7 year term would reduce costs for the city. It will allow staff to focus on other things other than
8 elections. The concern that I heard again, and I do share is accountability by electing someone
9 for four years who may not be responsive. I agree they may cause a good measure to add to
10 prevent this and to add the ability to relieve someone who is unresponsive to their concerns.
11 This is something that members of other municipalities have including our neighbors in
12 Riverdale Park and Bowie. With respect to staggered terms, I don't see that they don't see that
13 they have any benefit and I see that benefits gained from a four-year term go away when you
14 have the staggered terms. The need to reduce costs, there is no continuity on the council.
15 Additionally, I think staggered terms may add confusion for voters. The supposed benefit I have
16 heard about staggered terms is that not everyone would be elected at the same time. We would
17 have a whole new slate of council members. We have not had that happen in College Park and I
18 don't see that as a likelihood. This isn't in your control, but I would like to mention that if this
19 does go for referendum to the voters, I think these questions are distinct and separate and should
20 be two questions regarding four-year terms and two-year, excuse, regarding four-year terms and
21 staggered terms to voice their opinion on each. Thank you.

22 DAVID GRAY: Yes, hello, my name is David Gray and I live in Yarrow. I
23 spoke at the last the meeting and so at that time I primarily voiced my opposition of four-year
24 terms. I thought that they were unnecessary and added barriers for people running for office that
25 that was a very high hurdle. At this time I'm going to focus more on the staggered terms aspect.
26 As Ms. Nagle just mentioned there no is the economic benefit to having staggered terms as you
27 are effectively still running elections every two years. And running elections is effectively most
28 entirely fixed costs so it doesn't really matter if you are running one candidate, four candidates
or nine candidates. You know the machines cost the same, staffing the polls so there is no

1 intrinsic benefit to tax payers. And you get to the complication of that if you have two seats in
2 play at the same time you will have a higher probability of maybe a newer person breaking into
3 one of those seats. You know incumbents win almost all the time. If you stagger the terms, you
4 are likely to have one candidate that is an incumbent and the probability of the newer is not
5 great. But in 3 people on it for 2, it is possible. But 2 people running for 1, it sorts of like the
6 math probability issue. 4 people running for 2 seats is not terrible odds. 3 people running for 1
7 seat is pretty lousy odds. So I would urge this committee to err on the side of making sure that
8 public participation that people can and want to run for office is something measured and
9 benefits for the City. That is just all the benefits that I supposedly heard would make the council
10 a lot better or that people won't have to worry about re-election. That's not really a problem for
11 me. That's not a problem for the residents in the City entirely. If the councilmembers don't get
12 along, you know they are not going to get along over two years or four years time. I remember
13 council meetings that there was clear people didn't get along and you might have people not
14 serving out their term because it's four years. But a two year term, people can suffer through bad
15 company, but they may not suffer through four. There may be more turnover as people may not
16 serve out their four years terms. Thank you very much.

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17 CAROL MACKNIS: I am against the four year terms. I think two years terms
18 have worked out very well for this city. Having two year terms makes each elective official
19 much much more accountable to the voting population. It gives the voters a chance to hold these
20 officials accountable. If an official is doing a good job they get re-elected. If not, two years is a
21 very reasonable time to get rid of them through electing another representative. The cost of
22 having an election every two years, I think, is very reasonable considering how much this City
23 has in its budget. I disagree that it's a major economic benefit of getting rid of an election every
24 two years. With respect to the code, from my observation, almost every new person has been
25 involved in something with the City so they are more aware of what's going on. They are
26 bringing in new ideas, maybe the new ideas impact the learning curve. But it shouldn't. When it
27 comes to staggered terms, if this charter change comes about, we definitely need staggered
28 terms. Now my understanding of staggered terms is I'm in District 1. I have two
representatives. Each time one will be new and the other will not be so there is always someone

1 keeping the idea. So every two years I'll get a brand new council. Maybe after four years, half
2 of them have two years experience. That's not what I heard or understand. Probably my
3 misunderstanding of what people before me mentioned. Also it can have a negative impact on
4 someone who is with the university even though there is always a question of why the university
5 have to be involved. But it can have a major impact because they are normally here for four
6 years at the most. Some are even here for two years if they are in the graduate program. So it
7 would make an impact that they would have to consider not even running because they couldn't
8 fulfill the four years. I think there are two items that have not been mentioned: one there should
9 be a recall mechanism of which we do not have and is not listed. Number two I think there
10 should be term limits. Thank you. I'm sorry, Carol Macknis. I'm in District 1.

11 MARCIA BOOTH: I'm Marcia Booth, District 1 in Daniels Park. Thank you
12 very much for having us here this evening. I would like to express my dismay with the fact that
13 City Council would consider changing the limits from two to four without having some sort of a
14 resolution or having a term amendment that we would be able to recall a councilperson who is
15 not performing to the benefit of the people they are representing. We do not have that at this
16 time. We do not have a mechanism for removing anybody from the City Council other than
17 through elections. To allow somebody to remain on City Council for four years and not
18 performing would not be to the benefit of the voters. So if you are going to consider extending
19 from two years to four years than you should have included in the charter amendment a
20 mechanism to recall somebody who is sitting on the City Council. With reason, not just for willy
21 nilly. Now with regards to having people serve two years and then having a new election to have
22 another group of people come in for two years as staggered terms, I think that would not be
23 beneficial because it would not have the cohesiveness of City Council which is what you are
24 looking for supposedly. And also the same amount of costs because you would have been
25 having elections every two years. I'm not in favor of term limits because I believe we have
26 several people in City Council who have been for quite a while and have done a wonderful job.
27 Thank you.

28 OSCAR GREGORY: I live in College Park Woods. I'm going to try and be very
brief. And that is to say usually when you do things that drastically fundamentally change the
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1 constitution in our City, you have to have a pretty darn good reason for doing that. So far, I have
2 heard none. Do you want to extend to four year terms because somebody hasn't, doesn't
3 understand the government way? You should kind of know that before you even walk in, but
4 even still, it doesn't take that long. And besides people before them have had no problem trying
5 to catch up. So there has to be another reason for that and so far have not heard it. Most folks
6 have you heard before, you've heard all this stuff before, it seems to me. You already know this.
7 I'm just trying to figure out what you are trying to decide on because so most folks get re-elected
8 anyway. The history of College Park in 50 years, the last time we had an at large seat sorry was
9 eight years ago, sorry in 63, but most folks usually get re-elected and when they do and when
10 they decide to leave that's when a ticket opens up. And on top of it, just pointing out, students
11 are exempt from running for office entirely because they may not be able to commit for four
12 years, if you go that route. The idea that councilmembers get distracted from, because they have
13 to run for office, this doesn't cut the mustard. Usually you have to have, the first time you can
14 even start to campaigning is in September for a November ballot. So you have like two months
15 worth of and you should be going out and talking to people all the time. This body right now
16 wants to move themselves away from the residents and to do policy. So actually four year terms
17 would allow you to do that pretty well. This method right now that we have at two years is the
18 closest we as residents to democracy. To be able to pick people or to reward people that are
19 doing a good job and other people that will do a better job for us. The last thing I want to say is
20 that we have sampling of surveys, which is what folks should be doing, preliminary sampling of
21 neighborhoods, I have with me cards that residents that are stating they want to keep the current
22 system. They are fine with it. They don't want any changes. If I could turn these in. Just real
23 quick, preliminary findings, 51%, over half the residents that we polled want to keep the same
24 thing, the way that it is. About 20% want to change it. About 26% really don't have to think
25 about it. And 10% just slammed the door in my face. Those are preliminary findings across the
26 board. We will continue to do the surveys. We need to talk to the residents and find out. This is
27 a great crowd and we need to talk to the rest of the crowd as well. Sorry for taking so much
28 time. Thank you.

JAMES GARVIN: James Patrick Garvin, 4805 Drexel Road, College Park. I
have brought a lot of books to take quotes from. "The Federalist" "The Spirit of the Laws" by
Montesquieu in my battered old 1873 copy. I used that in council chambers. I brought the
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1 “Constitution of Maryland” the elective franchise clause and the battered old “Constitution of the
2 United States.” And then I remember who I’m dealing with. I’m dealing with the Council of
3 College Park. And if I use these words, I will only be mocked. I am one of those filthy,
4 disenfranchised residents, not a college student. I’m not a university developer. I don’t matter.
5 And in the conflict we had the last year about citizens not voting right, I’m dealing with the
6 College Park Mayor, PJ, Patrick and this Constitution of Maryland and the United States back to
7 them. So why would I use these words when it only brings mockery? Why would I use these
8 words when I really don’t have a voice when there is a mechanism under way. And I cannot
9 alter that mechanism. I am tilting at windmills because I am a resident. The Mayor and this
10 Council ought to weigh in and let everyone be part of College Park. And what they really want
11 is an electorate that they want to engineer. Look at these old people. They are not part of that
12 electorate because they are old. They are conservative. They are knowledgeable and have lived
13 life. We know what we are doing. We are raising children. I have carburetors to clean and
14 grass to cut, yet I am here tilting windmills because I know my count is not my own. I am
15 against an extension of terms and I’m against staggered terms because I distrust them. I think
16 they will only be used to outmaneuver this group and disenfranchise them more. Thank you very
17 much.

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19 (CLAPPING AND SOME SAYING YEAH AND ONE PERSON SAYING
20 EVEN THOUGH I AM OLD)

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22 CAROL NEZZO: From District 3 and I was here last time so if you will recall, I
23 like two year terms. And I have pictures of people in the street. Some are singing, some are
24 dancing, someone who does accounting. Someone who does landscaping. People who have
25 expertise and skills like you all do. Thank you for coming and volunteering your skills. We
26 need to have government of the people, by the people, (UNINTELLIGBLE). And that means by
27 the people. Thank you.

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29 DAVID DORSCH: Good evening. My name is David Dorsch and I’ve been a
30 resident here for about 45 years or so. And for the 45 years I’ve been in College Park, the City
31 Council has had terms of two years and it’s worked well for all these years. I just remember Jack
32 Perry, who was on this Council for many, many years, because the constituents wanted him to

1 represent their wishes which he did. He did not spend that much time running for election. He
2 didn't have to. His residents wanted him. There are even current members of this council who
3 have been elected every two years for many elections. Why because the constituents want them.
4 Other jurisdictions of have different terms of office for various reasons. College Park doesn't
5 have to be like that. We can still be unique if it comes to that and maintain our two year terms.
6 Maintaining the two year terms of office will eliminate the possibility the City will have to make
7 to changes in the City Charter. My councilmember is doing what I think is in my and the City's
8 best interest so I vote for him. And if not, I don't want to have to wait another two years to vote
9 to replace him. I ask this commission to consider all the facts, the City's history, and
10 recommend to the Council that the current two year terms for the Councilmembers be retained.
11 Thank you.

12 MARY COOK: Mary Cook, 4705 Kiernan Road. I've been a resident of the City
13 almost 20 years. I think everyone up here knows what I think. That our elected officials should
14 be elected every two years. The reason I'm getting up tonight is to point out that if this should
15 go through, if the Council decides to change our current code to four years that we should have
16 the right to recall. And the other item I wanted to point out was, and maybe somebody's done it
17 already, I'm sorry I'm late, is that you may or may not have seen the comments that were already
18 put online and the names were redacted. You know what, my name is out there already. I think
19 those people names should be as well. And that's the only comment I wanted to make. Thank
20 you very much for serving us. Thank you.

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22 Respectfully submitted by Sheryl DeWalt, Contract Secretary
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