CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, March 15, 2022
PARTICIPANTS:

Charter Review Commission:

FRED EVANS
JOHN BECKER
DAVE GOTTESMAN
HAROLD HODGES
JACK KELLY
KEVIN OWEN
ANITA POWELL
SALLY KRAM
IZOLA SHAW
MARISSA VALERI
ROBERT WRIGHT
ROBERT KURNICK (Ex-Officio)

Staff:

CYNTHIA WALTERS, Deputy City Attorney
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SARA TAYLOR-FERRELL, City Clerk/Director of Council Operations

MELISSA WIAK, Management Assistant

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PROCEEDINGS

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Okay, I'm going to read this. I'm going to read the disclaimer.
Okay.

Good evening, everyone and welcome to the Charter Review Commission Town Hall. Tonight's town hall is being recorded as per the Open Meetings Act. Before we begin, here are some important guidelines for this town hall. Members of the Charter Review Commission will be the only participants allowed to have their cameras on during the town hall. All other participants' cameras should remain off during the town hall. Those who wish to speak should use the raise hand function and wait to be acknowledged by the Rockville staff town hall facilitator. Once you're called on to speak, you may unmute your mike. Speakers will have three minutes total and will be notified when your time is expired. Once you are done speaking, you may continue to listen to the town hall meeting. Please keep your microphones muted so that other speakers can be heard and to
avoid audio feedback. Thank you for joining us for this important town hall which will begin momentarily.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Hello everyone. My name is Sara Taylor-Ferrell. I am the city's current Director of the Council of Operations here for the city of Rockville and I'm also the staff liaison for the Charter Review Commission. Tonight, we're here to hear the input from our participants who are joining us at this town hall this evening, and I will introduce you now to our Chair of the Commission which is Mr. Fred Evans. Thank you and Fred--

MR. EVANS: Thank you Sara. Good evening. I'm Fred Evans as she said, the Chair of the Rockville Charter Review Commission. The commissioners and I welcome you to this virtual town hall. We greatly appreciate your participation and look forward to hearing your points of view about how we can make Rockville an even greater place to live. Your feedback is very important.
First, I would like to introduce the Commission members and then get started. Cal Pungess (phonetic), wave. Jack Kelly, Sally Kram, Kevin Owen, Anita Neil-Powell, Izola Shaw, Marissa Valeri and Robert Wright. Hopefully John Beckham will be joining us also. I would also like to introduce Robert Kurnick, he's an ex officio member of the Commission as board of supervisor for this election's chair.

The mayor and council established the 2020 Charter Review Commission on February 24th, 2020 to review and make recommendations to the mayor and council regarding the charter of the city of Rockville. A copy of the Charter is located on the Rockville city website. The mayor and council resolution 9-20 established the scope of the work and topics to review which can be found on the Charter Review's web page. For the purpose of this town hall, we will focus on election related topics to include but not limited to increasing voter turn-out, engaging our diverse community and updating city charter,
pardon me, city code and charter. During this town hall meeting, there's a link question there for feedback. The link is located in the chat area to the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. If you answer the question there during tonight's session, your answers will be acknowledged. But if you answer them from the web page, it will not. All comments will be taken into consideration as we finalize our recommendations to the mayor and council. Thanks again and we will open the floor for your input. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: I am question -- Danny or Michael, do we have any -- I see there were two attendees earlier. Can we push them through to speak?

DANNY: Alright, let me check that real quickly for you. I'm looking now. Alright, Scott Moore?

MR. MOORE: Hello.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Alright, let's go.

MR. MOORE: Sorry. Hello, I'm still relatively a new resident to Rockville. I live
just across from Merrillville High School and I'm personally very partial to the idea that adding a district lines to the city. Now, I'm not in favor of it being only by district but rather a hybrid system. In my experience that usually helps with representation of different communities within a city while also allowing for a wider city voice to be heard. That's just my personal idea and preference, but obviously I'll leave it to you all to figure that out in the end.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Alright, thank you Scott. The next person is Eric Fulton.

MR. FULTON: Good evening and thank you for the opportunity. I don't have prepared remarks I'm just kind of going off the questions I'm looking at in the chat. I've lived in Rockville for about 12 years, I currently live in the west end. I've lived in a couple other neighborhoods.

My general thoughts on all issues related to voting, I do favor as the previous speaker did an increase in overall representation. The city's boundaries and population have
increased significantly and the members of the mayor council have not in recent years even though their terms have increased in time. I am personally ambivalent on districting, but I know that there is a call for it in the city in many district parts. So, I think there is some benefits to it. My thoughts on drawing districting lines and where I have concerns is because we have not had districts drawn to this point, there are existing HOAs, associations, factions within this city that if district lines were drawn to include all of them, I worry about a concentration of power in certain segments of the city. I would want to take a long look at how these lines are drawn and make sure that is an open and transparent process to make sure that we're not artificially inflating the importance of just a minor amount of people in this city because the goal is to increase representation through all parts of the city.

Earlier I took a survey indicating this and I would like the opportunity to say it out.
loud again. There was a question on the table of do we think that expanding the number of council members or redistricting will increase the chances and diverse outreach. I think it will to a degree, but I think the answer to all of these questions is money. I think people are limited more by the availability of time and funds then they are by the color of their skin, or their ethnic background or even where they live in the city. Until we find a way to level the playing field socio-economically, I think it will be hard press for us to make a real dent into how we claim to increase diversity among people. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of money to run and to serve. So those are my early thoughts on that. Thank you for this opportunity.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Okay, the next speaker is Joe Gillespie.

SPEAKER: Joe? It's your turn.

MR. GILLESPIE: Okay, great. Yes so I also don't have really any prepared (inaudible) kind of short. I took the survey last week and I
sent in an email with some additional thoughts.

You know, one of the things that I don't think looks fully explored in the questions in the survey, I think was the use of something like a single transferable voter's system. I think using that would avoid a lot of increase representation so people feel like they have someone who represents their views on the council. Well at the same time avoiding all the challenges and potential pitfalls you know, that were raised by the last speaker for example, member districts and where to draw those districts and how to do that. So, I would really strongly urge that this body take a look at some of the work associated with that, see how other cities and even other larger bodies have adopted, you know, voting systems like that. Hopefully that would be an effective method of allowing people to feel heard, feel like they are part of the process, that they have someone that represents them and hopefully increase voter turn-out and fairness at the same time without significant additional expense.
MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you, Joe.

Next, we have Randy Ulton. Randy?

MR. ULTON: Can we speak? Can you hear me?

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes, we can hear you.

MR. ULTON: I'm a definite supporter of districts for this city. I vouched before the resolution a few years back about district wide representation. I look for a city that addresses our city's demographics and that is something that I've yearned for in my lifetime. I also think that this is so important for our diversity. I don't think that we have reached that. We've made gains over the years but we have yet to reach that pentacle where we've achieved that part of it. I also think that we have an economic sustainability issue with our city when we leave a lot of these other participants out. I remember Counselor -- a former council member of the Virginia (inaudible) resolution. It was a two to two resolution vote that failed to go forward. Within her resolution,
she identified the importance that we look at the stakeholders and their contributions that they can make. When we problem solve in this city, currently we have all five council members are from the one cluster: Richmond or Montgomery. Being a former school teacher, I'm an advocate for education but at the same time, we also have Rockville High School, we have Newton High School, we have Gaithersburg High School and we also have parts of the Walter Johnson cluster. We need those individuals to be members of this council. We need that representation in order for the city together to gather as a whole. Right now, I see that it is so easily to be a divided city where I look for ways that we can come together as one. I see the economics' impact when we try to look at Town Center and I will be hard press to tell you that I think that the representation for and from the people and folks of Richmond-Montgomery are -- I want a 100 percent support. But I'm a Woodmont cluster at Walter Johnson former odd person. I actually live in the Woodmont cluster. I
can tell you that things happen out there that
people really don't understand but that's why that
representation is so important and so needed. I
think we're missing this diversity and I do
applaud that -- when I look at the wall in the
city and I see 150 years, I'm privileged -- I feel
proud that we've broken through where we have
diversity where women are serving as mayor and on
the council in that fashion. But when you go back
and look at the history of our city, that wasn't
always the case. It's important that we bring
forward the richness that we have and our ability
to bring forward that diversity. I acknowledge the
gains but they are far too short for me and I
really implore you to look at this from the
diversity and the richness that we've still yet to
bring to the table. The importance to bring
forward all five clusters and I know some of you
are educators yourself who would never run student
council where we didn't include and where we
weren't bringing forward everybody that we could
possibly can and that's only going to be
accomplished by going with a seven member Rockville city council.

I also would say that our four years-- we also just left our four year and moved to the four years terms. We had two years terms maybe we could manage better about bringing forward change. But now with four years, we have eight years going on soon where we would have this representation issue. If we don't address this representation it is going to cost the city. I know that all of us I think have the passion to want to do the right thing or to try to improve this city as the chair Fred Evans said, I want 100 percent on board. But I think we have to bring everybody and we're better together than we are separately.

So, in conclusion, I advocate for the district form of government where representation is addressed and we look for all the opportunities by which we can bring forward that richness of the diversity whether it be geographical, our school clusters, by race, by gender and any means that we possibly can. Because right now, and I looked at
the Maryland general assembly, there's a bill that was pending last year I'm sure is on the floor right now by the speaker about at large voting. My question to you all is why would we want to stay with at large? Why would we want to do that? I believe that district government brings opportunity for groups that are not always represented. I thank you for this time to speak that and I applaud all your efforts to try to address this problem but it has many different levels and many different aspects by which we are impacted as a city so, thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Randy? At this point, I don't see any more hands. If you wish to speak, please use the raise hand feature and we will certainly accommodate your comments. Okay, Claire Funkhauser (phonetic). Go ahead Claire.

MS. FUNKHAUSER: Good evening, thank you for letting me speak. One question that I have before I begin and that is, how many-- the percentage of voters in the last election? I believe I saw 70 percent at one point? Is that
correct?

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Robert you want to take that question as the chair?

MR. WRIGHT: I can tell you that -- Can you hear me now?

MS. FUNKHAUSER: Yes.

MR. WRIGHT: Okay. In the last election, the number -- the percentage of registered voters who voted was a 31 point something and I've forgotten the exact number so, maybe 68.9 percent of registered voters did not vote in the last--

MS. FUNKHAUSER: Oh, okay. So, that may have been a misprint or misunderstanding on my part because even 31% -- getting a lot of feedback, I hope you're not getting feedback from me -- but even 31% was considerably larger and I would attribute to the mail-in voting which seemed to be very successful.

I do want to go back to talk about the number of council members and also the idea of district voting. This is just the perspective of somebody who was in Clark's office for 12 years
and worked with lots of council members and several mayors. I'm not sure we need many more council members. Seven would be okay, I think five is sufficient for a city of our size. I hear people say we've grown tremendously in size. We really have not. The population of Rockville when I was working in this city was about in the sixties like it is now. We also have an (inaudible) of boundaries tremendously you know, since Fallsborough (phonetic). So, I think that there's some-- a common misperceptions for that. So, I think seven-member council members would be okay, but I think five is sufficient.

I differ somewhat from Mr. Ulton for example on the idea of districts versus at large council members. It distressed me when I was the city clerk that there were more than a few council members and a couple of mayors who really weren't knowledgeable about the city as a whole. Some of them had never been to certain areas of the city unless they were looking for votes for their elections. They did not have a knowledge of this
city as a whole. I think that is something every
council member and certainly every mayor has to
have. I fear that if we would have district
representation the concentration would be on
knowing your district and not knowing this city.
So that is the prism I have about turning into
districts. Let alone the nightmare of trying to
figure out how this would be appropriated. That
would be a tremendous job that would probably take
at least two years on the part of the board of
elections to even submit something to the mayor
and council. I also, back to the number of council
members you would need to (inaudible) up the
staff, the clerks' office, keeping up with the
mayor and four council members is a full-time
job. If you add extra council members that would
be even greater. One more point about a larger
number of council members. You may have an
inclination upon the mayor and council to begin to
think about breaking up into committees. Similar
to how the county council is, just to handle the
work. So, you know, that's something to consider.
So those are the things I can think of right now. I'm sure there will be others and I open ended question.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you Ms. Funkhauser. Okay next we have Miss Rudolph.

MS. RUDOLPH: -- the representation so I would support districts. I suggest the districts be based on planning areas to make sure that all areas of the city are equally represented. But I also think that a huge factor is that the city's outreach and community engagement approach including announcing this meeting is based on the assumption that people live in single homes and typically in neighborhoods that are represented by organized home owners' associations or community associations. There is a huge demographic of renters in this city who the city's outreach approach now does not engage. It turns out that many times when they're planning meetings, they require no notification and inclusion of people who live within a certain geographic area. The individual tenants and residents of multi-family
rental buildings are not being contacted. So, the whole process of community engagement is underrepresenting what now the latest housing demographic. The city has just published its data based on the 2020 census. Nearly half of residents in this city are in multi-family rental buildings. We are not reaching out to them and we certainly are not represented on the council. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you Ms. Rudolph. The next person is Miss Savoss (phonetic).

MS. SAVOSS: Hi, thank you. So, I wanted to talk about approval voting and my support for approval voting. And by approval voting I mean allowing voters to vote for as many candidates as they want. So, right now we have four slots for the mayor-- four slots for the council and so voters can only vote for four candidates and one slot for the mayor. So, voters can only vote for one mayor. This is fine if there's to say only five candidates in the race or two mayors in the race, or two mayor candidates in the race, but
increasingly the field is getting much more crowded and that leads to situations where voters might have for example in this situation of the council, they might have two slates of candidates who they would be fine with and a third slate or a third individual candidate that they would be horrified to have elected. Maybe everyone in the city agrees or kind of okay with two, with two of the slates but really don't want the third one. Or you have a situation where you have maybe three slates of candidates and one individual candidate who is advocating voting for themselves among their supporters and that candidate may win because the field is so divided. So, I strongly support approval voting and allowing people to just vote for more than four candidates. It still gives everybody an equal chance at voting. They can decide to spread their voices or spread out their vote more or concentrate it more on the candidates they like.

The one thing I'll add to that is there's been a lot of discussion of rate choice
voting as a solution to this problem and the reason that I support approval voting over rate choice voting is first of all that there's fewer spoiled ballots. So, we with rate choice voting you have a lot of voters that don't quite understand, not a large percentage in total of approval rating, but of those who don't understand the rules and their ballots might be spoiled. Another reason is that there is more than one way to effectively grade approval voting or whatever you may want to call it, sorry I mean choice voting, there's more than one way to determine the winner. You could do instant run-off, you could do-- there's other forms. It's really kind of confusing to voters and so, I think approval voting is this really elegant solution where people who want to just vote for four candidates for council, for one candidate mayor can absolutely go ahead. But people whose priority is to for example not see certain candidates in office can choose to spread their voice out more. I think it's really really important especially as
fields get more crowded, especially as candidates get more radical frankly, that we give voters this choice. It leads to better elections with outcomes that are more preferred by more voters. Thank you very much for your time.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Next, we have Mr. Ulton.

MR. ULTON: Yes. I appreciate that opportunity and the comments made. I look at this as a math problem. Some of the HOAs and the communities, they have a large number of votes from their-- that they represent. It's very hard for smaller communities to come ahead and address some of the mathematical problems of a vote to be a winner in an election. That's really what we have at hand. We have great council members and mayors. But the point of it is that we would really have a hard time mathematically bringing in other groups of representatives from other diverse populations which is something we need to do. We have to have a city or we should have a city that represents our city's demographics. And this
voting where we have one -- I use the example the
one cluster. Having all five members from one
school cluster is not helping our city's other
initiatives. It mathematically hurts. We have
Rockville cluster for example. That cluster is
8/10th part of the city and it's had one mayor
Marchuccio and it's had Julio Carr who is now a
delegate. But we really do need to look at how we
are getting through the math of an election.
Getting that addressed where an individual can
mount a campaign that is you know, from a
different point of the city that would bring
something to the table to help problem solve some
of the concerns. I don't see any other way than by
district.

I would encourage the commission to do
this. I've done this. I've done a chart, a
spreadsheet on where are we getting our most
number of representatives from? We're not getting
them from all corners of the city. We're getting
them specific areas consistently. If you look at
the last 20 years and why would that be? Why would
that be something where we only would poll, where
only certain parts of the city can bring forward
candidates and winners in an election? We lose so
much by doing that part that we miss some of the
pieces that these other folks would bring in to
the city. Again, it is a math problem where a
small HOA made up of 700 homes, how would it
compete against a 7000 home-owner HOA? You can't.
Whenever that aspect of it happens, where a lot of
the information, the needs, the attention and I
think the engagement. One individual spoke about
the renters not being part of the city. We have
got to bring everybody to the city. We have
tremendous problems since COVID, we have many
unknowns but it's going to have to have to require
all of us to solve these problems. I really
prefer, I'm really an advocate to reaching out to
the corners of this city, those groups that have
never been tapped into and bringing them forward
in the district type of government. I don't think
we just need to rely on one group or one part of
the city to consistently bring forward that part.
If you do that spreadsheet, you might just find yourself shocked at where are the candidates coming from that are successful? And why are they successful? Because they have 5000 homes or renters or apartments or condominiums. That is very hard say someone who is a candidate coming forward saying from a 300. How does that work? I mean how does that work? How in the world could that happen where that candidate can be successful? How would we ever turn that page? We've turned this page and we've done a lot with this part but we still have to keep working to be a more diverse city in that aspect. So, if you look at the math, you see where the candidates are coming from and you see that it doesn't mean that we want to go beyond where we are. That would be something that I think would help the commission, the Charter Commission when they made their presentation to the mayor council and just say this is the X number of candidates, this is the clusters that they represent, these are the communities they come from. Is this the city that
we want? If that's what it is then that's what it is, but it is pretty much a concrete number and it's a data driven answer. Thank you so much.


MR. RUSSO: I received the questionnaire that you sent to the other members of the community or something along those lines and I sent it back. So, I won't go over all those answers but I'm generally in support of adding two council members and certainly open to district seats as well or even something like the model that the county has with a mix of at large and district seats to provide you know, a balance between the local attention and concern and representation and also have members on the body who have the whole city as a perspective. I'm somewhat skeptical that it's going to resolve in great achievements in terms of representation and diversity and all that. But I mean it's a chance. It provides more opportunity for it but I would just caution against raising expectations a little
bit too much about what adding districts and additional council members will achieve.

What other point that I thought was really important in your questions and in the work that you have been doing is the independence of the board of supervisors of elections. I think, you know, particularly with everything that's going on as a backdrop in the country, I think these are treasures that we have in the board of supervisors of elections. I think in practice and in appearance too. I think we need to be very sensitive to the appearance of their independence and give them the space to do that. So, I'd urge you to consider that in your deliberations.

There was also a question about the appointment process for the board of supervisors of elections, appointments and reappointments and I wasn't sure exactly what the questions were getting at there, but one thing I'd urge the commission to look at is the practice of commissioners serving on commissions, particularly the quasi-official ones where they have expired
terms. They're serving long past their term in some cases and I don't know what the Charter says about that, but I do think that's something the Charter Review should look at and whether or not there should be some provision there for actually ending the commissioners' service when their term expires. So, I think that's something to consider.

Your charge for the mayor and council included a lot of other things in addition to elections and the number of council seats. In particular there were a couple related to the board of authority to appoint a board of health or to establish quarantine regulations. I guess I would be very cautious here about that too. I wouldn't support that because I think one of the things that we learned from this pandemic is that when you -- people can be very easily confused when you're hearing multiple messages from different levels of government. I think that if we add one at the municipal level then that could really not add much value when we contribute already through our county taxes to those services being provided by
the county. From the county level we also have the
state officials weighting in on these things as
well, so I just don't really see a role there for
the city of Rockville. So, I would not support
changing the charter for those. I don't know if
that's anything that you've looked at in your
deliberations because everything so far has been
about these other topics but I did want to mention
that. I think that's all. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you very
much. There is one call-in user here and I am not
sure that that call-in user has an opportunity to
raise his hands. So, what I'd like to do is call
in user number four. It's a 202 prefix. Now I'm
not going to give the number just the 202 prefix.
I'm going to turn to Michael to see if there is
something you'd like to say.

MICHAEL: --coming through--

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes, okay, well,
there are no other hands. We do remind you that if
you'd like to speak, if you could raise your hand.
Use the raise hand function, we will gladly
entertain your comments. Alright, Ms. Wolarsky, please go.

MS. WOLARSKY: Thank you so much for the opportunity and thank you for convening this meeting. I think it's important to be able to discuss this range of issues in an open forum. I wanted to comment on a couple of things.

One is the expansion of voting rights to new groups and just based on the survey that was done here as part of the town hall, it was not very clear what specific new groups are included in the questions. So, as a comment for you know, for future analysis please include the details. It was just very hard to figure out what exactly is meant.

My second comment is on scheduling elections to coincide with the federal elections. I think it's a really bad idea. The municipal level elections already carry a significance of local magnitude. That takes a lot of energy on behalf of the citizens to educate themselves about the programs, the platforms that the candidates
are running and with last elections we saw more than a dozen candidates for council seats. If citizens are -- if residents are expected to make informed choices, we should afford them time to educate themselves about the candidates. If we were to schedule our elections to coincide with state elections, federal elections as is one of the ideas, my fear is that municipal level elections would just be swallowed in partisanship. Our elections right now are non-partisan in a larger national level or state level issues and we essentially would risk losing an informed vote on municipal election-- on the municipal candidates. So, I think that the scheduling should stay in the off years. It really allows us as residents of Rockville to have the peace and quiet to educate ourselves and make informed decisions. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Thank you. There are apparently no raised hands. Just to remind you, if you'd like to speak raise your hand even if you've spoken once. We'll make we'll take your order. Okay Mr. Russo.
MR. RUSSO: Yes, piggy backing on the previous speaker, I would also support keeping Rockville elections in the off year. I guess I would worry too that we would not be able to do mail-in voting if -- what the implication would be if we went to match the state or the presidential election years would we be able to still do our mail-in vote which I think was a big success in 2019 I guess it was. That would be another concern I would have. Would we be able to maintain our mail-in vote if we were to align with state or federal elections.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Mr. Moore.

MR. MOORE: Hello, as the previous speaker did, I would also like to reference the idea behind changing the years of the elections. I personally am also fairly partial to the off-year elections. I get the idea behind wanting to boost turn out in our elections. That's a laudable goal and I would like to see our elections have a little more participation. That's just seems to
be the nature of municipal elections, people don't want to always participate. But I like the --
what's the word I'm looking for? The specialness of doing them in their own time. I mean having these -- in many people's mind these small municipal races being given their due that they'd probably wouldn't get if they're having to compete with the noise around a presential or even a gubernatorial election. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you.

Commissioner Hodges.

MR. HODGES: Yes, I have a question for the last speaker, if that's possible?

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes, Mr. Moore. Would you like me to open his mike and you talk to him?

MR. HODGES: Yeah.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes, okay.

MR. HODGES: Mr. Moore, thank you for your question. Your question kind of (inaudible) to the comments we've heard this evening. I think my question would be why is it -- what gives you
the impression that if Rockville were to hold
their -- our municipal elections that would
somehow, that presidential election would kind of
like somehow overshadow our efforts. What gives
you that impression? I'm just kind of curious on
your thoughts on that.

MR. MOORE: Well, a lot of my background
is actually in working in elections, being a
campaign person and usually if like-- let's say
there is a presidential election going on. The
90% of the people are just going to be concerned
about that presidential election in my experience
at least. Going door to door and talking to
voters, most of the time when you talk to voters,
if there is a presidential election going on they
are not-- they'll vote in the whatever municipal
election is going on but they aren't going to pay
as nearly as much attention to it as they would.
There's definitely more people that would vote in
a presidential election year than a off- cycle
municipal election but the people voting in the
off- cycle municipal election will actually have
done a lot of, in my experience actually, they
will have done a lot of research with actual
candidates then the people that just show up
because there is a presidential election going on.
If that makes sense. I don't know if I explained
that correctly but that's in my experience.

MR. HODGES: I want to make sure that I
understand you. Your voice, point of view might
represent other voices as well. So, what you are
saying is that there is no automatic spill-over
effect from a presidential election and people
caring about voting locally that would, that is
what you've experienced.

MR. MOORE: In my experience, don't get
me wrong, there are people who vote specifically
in presidential election years that will also
research their local municipal stuff. But there's
so many people who do no research at all and who
go out to just vote on the presidential election
and then just, let's say pick the -- well, I guess
it wouldn't really count with our elections
because they are non-partisan but they just pick
the party going down the line. More in this case
it would be like picking just whoever's name
they've heard.

MR. HODGES:  Got it. Thank you very much
for your time.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL:  Okay, we have one
more speaker hand raised. Please. Mr. Goldfinger.

MR. GOLDFINGER:  This is my first time
attending one of these meetings so I've just been
sort of an observer recently appointed to one of
the city's commissions. But listening to the last
couple of comments, I've been a resident of the
city for better than 45 years I think. I remember
when city elections were held by themselves in, I
believe the spring and turnout was really pitiful
which is why -- I think- we moved to combining it
with other elections on a larger scale to get
voters out. So, I think the question is do we want
informed voters which may be in the 20% of the
electorate category or do we want more people
participating. I think that's what we need to
consider. Does that make sense? So, we've done
both in this city in my recollection and I think we need to look at both sides of that particular coin. So, I will go back to being an observer of the meeting. Thank you very much for your time.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Okay, the next hand is Ms. Funkhauser (phonetic).

MS. FUNKHAUSER: Thank you. I just wanted to respond to Mr. Goldfinger if I could. He is correct. Years ago, municipal elections were in the spring in April, I think. The reason that they were changed to November was for a couple of reasons, I believe. One was because that was the more formal time for the elections occur, but it also had to do with the city's budget cycle because the fiscal year of the city begins on July 1st, the mayor and council would barely be inaugurated when they would have to vote on the budget. By having elections in November, the mayor and council could be creating the budget and then at the end of July they'd have a complete knowledge.

But I also wanted to commend the
commission when I read the questions that were
sent some time ago and I read some of the other
things that the mayor and council said we could
look at if we wanted to. I was blown away. I
thought boy, are we going to (inaudible) what the
sky should be red instead of blue? I mean it was
just amazing to me. So, I congratulate you for
taking on all of this even if you were just
concentrating on elections. That part would have a
been a lot of work in itself. So, thank you very
much on behalf of the city.

MR. EVANS: Thank you.

MS. FUNKHAUSER: I appreciate it.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Alright
next, we have Mr. Fisher.

MR. FISHER: Hello? Can you hear me?

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes, we can hear
you.

MR. FISHER: Okay. I'm Steven Fisher,
I've been a resident of Rockville for nearly 65
years coming this October. Also, I run for
council in two very interesting years. One was in
1984 in April and the other was November of 1985. So, I've bridged the transition that occurred. It was pretty clear to me that the shift from April to November in terms of the electorate was to put people in a more familiar frame of mind. November is the month we elect people to office and that was in my perspective as a candidate one of the primary reasons for doing so.

The question of now shifting our non-partisan elections to a potential partisan election year cycle, meaning the even years in November, I definitely would not recommend that considering mayor council members are non-partisan. Now they would have to make an appearance on a partisan election ballot. All the groups that put out sample ballots, league of women voters excetera, would now have to identify that there is an additional group of candidates who are not affiliated with either political party running in a particular election in one locale. That adds first of all to the cost of their ballots and also the confusion that there is so
many races to be looked at, most people aren't going to go that far down. So, the idea that we would gain a number of new voters, I don't think will pan out.

In fact, the transitions I've noticed since at time first moving to a November election didn't really increase the turnout. I believe two years later the city abandoned its own non-partisan voter registration system and went with Montgomery county, which is a partisan registration system assuming that all these registered voters and living in Rockville who were not registered with the city would somehow gain interest in city elections and participate. That is not proven to be the case. The people who are interested in city elections are the ones who participate in city matters and board and commission members and so forth. The city has had a difficult time finding people just to fill those roles let alone people interested in helping people get elected to city council or to run themselves. The diversity of the city is a big
challenge. I noticed that when I was a candidate and I used the voter list from the city, if there weren't voters on a particular street, there was no reason for me to go down there. However, it is a street within the city of Rockville and those residents may indeed need some services or have their issues brought before the mayor and council to be addressed. The issue of having people not participating in city elections and not being registered can't easily be addressed if they're non-citizens or if simply don't choose to be active in city politics but prefer the partisan flavored politics and devote all their time and energy and resources to those races. That would also impact the city if we were to combine with state or federal elections that there is a limited pool of money out there for candidates to obtain. If you have limited resources and you want to support a gubernatorial or state senatorial or congressional candidate, you probably aren't going to save a lot of money just for mayor council candidates because there're too far down the list.
for you to really consider worth investing in.

That makes it difficult for the candidates who want to run because where are they going to get the money unless they're financial independent and can do so. So, that would be my take on the issue.

Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRRELL: Thank you. I think that Commissioner Valeri wanted to speak?

MS. VALERI: Yes, I actually just wanted to plausit to everybody including the people that still had their hands up, that I am a big fan of history. I think that we need to learn from it in order not to repeat it. But the focus of the Commission is looking forward and looking at how to build a structure for the mayor and council of the future and voters in the future. So, I would love to hear from anyone how they feel these voting proposals and the difference systems and having representative districts or not or moving the data or not, looking forward how do you think this could affect participation in our elections?

Recognizing that as the 2020 census notes we have
grown as a city. We're more populated now and so, I just wanted to get a sense from folks about that.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Okay, we still have some hands raised so, Ms. Valeri we're going to go back to the hands and hope there is responses for you. Next is Ms. Wolarsky (phonetic).

MS. WOLARSKY: I wanted to go back to the link between scheduling and voter turn-out. I'm not convinced that this link is substantiated. Commissioner Valeri, I really appreciate your encouragement to think forward and I respond to this with a consideration that the past election was the very first vote by mail election during which the vote by mail concept was tested in a municipal election east of Mississippi. It was almost the first selected -- it wasn't like a trial of concept right? Proof of concept and in this election voter turnout was doubled from the previous election. So, if we have a successful proof of concept that has occurred in one instance, I'm not convinced that this successful
proof of concept should be immediately abandoned
in other to seek another concept to achieve the
same results. If doubling voter turnout is not
enough, I'm not sure that there are statistical
examples out there around the nation in which
voter turnout in municipal elections was doubled
by switching from one method to another twice in a
row. So, I think that we also need to pause and
stick to one method and make sure that, okay if we
committed to doing vote by mail that we do vote by
mail and really see that whether it works or
whether it doesn't work. Some of the previous
speakers said it very clearly that if we switch
co-scheduling as in the same year as national or
gubernatorial elections, we very much effectively
abandon the very concept of vote by mail because
of how differently elections are administered for
those races. So, that's number one. That is
looking forward. We you know, that the city only
did it once. The city needs to do it at least one
or two more times to actually see if we are able
to increase voter turnout right?
Now in terms of the other questions I wanted to also add I do think that there is value in looking at kind of proportional representation thru districts and it is precisely for the reasons that other speakers have already outlined that the composition is so very different of the city that we have larger HOA districts, we have older communities, we have very diverse communities in terms of socio-demographic compositions but also ownership composition of residences. The idea that there is a candidate who is from a particular community and is running on behalf of that community to represent that community in the council is very appealing to me. My concern is that there might actually not be competition if there are districts -- depending on how many seats there are and how it's all structured. I would imagine that there might not be competition in some districts and that there might be vigorous competition among other districts of this city. Then how is that type of election truly representative and open and transparent and
competitive if there is not enough competition, if we already see that there are so many people hailing from certain parts of the city as candidates. So, that wouldn't entail probably a lot lot more outreach and a lot more resources on behalf of the city going into that work. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you, Ms. Funkhauser.

MS. FUNKHAUSER: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to raise my hand. I'm sorry.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Fulton.

MR. FULTON: In sort of in response to Commissioner Valeri and piggy-backing on the previous comments with regards to districting, well I think it's definitely something that should be looked into. There's a lot of support on it. I said that earlier that I was standing in favor of it. I don't stand in favor of just districted council persons. I feel strongly that there should be some at larges as well. I'm thinking about it
from a representation perspective. The one side
is, yes there are, I don't know why we keep going
on to the HOAs, there are pockets of small
communities, there is segments of this city that
are not represented by a council person who hails
from that area, but I and everyone else on this
call have four council members that I can speak
with that are representing me and one mayor. I
would be concerned if that would go down to simply
one. I also I would worry that could possibly
further, I don't know, further a divide whether
perceived or real versus certain neighborhood when
it comes to certain city issues. I feel strongly
that just one mayor might not be enough to bridge
that divide that there needs to be district
representation. But if we're going that route
there needs to be at large representation as well.

I echo what I think the previous person
said, I think vote by mail was an overwhelming
success. I don't have any ways to improve it at
the moment, but I think that looking into ways, if
there's even incremental gains to be made that's
wonderful. Increasing the voter turnout as best as we did. I think if you really want to look forward someone can take a look in the box chain voting. Maybe not for two years or six years but maybe ten years down the road. I see one of the commissioners laughing at my suggestion. So, that's kind of what I think in terms of looking forward to the future. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Alright thank you.

Mr. Allton (phonetic).

MR. ALLTON: Alright. I concur, I think the voting by mail was a huge success. I would definitely keep that. I know we went probably from 13% to 24% for voter turnout. I'm optimistic. I also think going forward having a district person that is locally, would also bring out -- they wouldn't just vote for that one person, hopefully that they would also vote for the -- there would be other ways that we could either, we could figure this so that there would be others ways for us to engage that part of the community. But that we're doing on the flip side is that, and the
research will show this, is that the at large
voting--I encourage you to research why the at
large voting is not a favored style by many
organizations that are in place to look at the
Voting's Right Act and supported that. I did that
research you should do that research. You have to
look at every paper or thesis that comes out but
it's up to us to read the lines to figure out why
is this so harmful. I think it comes out in our
city's engagement and I think what I really wanted
at the end of the day I want people thinking
Rockville first. That doesn't happen in my
community. My community will go to other
locations, we're on the west side of I-270. We're
geographically separated from many folks. There
are many aspects of this that I've advocated or
lobbied for during the budget but the reality of
it is there aren't many options that--like when
we had the parking in Town Center. I advocated and
I said that to the current mayor council, parking
is hurting us and data wise how much of it is
hurting us. Our folks go to Rio, they go to
Camlins (phonetic), they go to Bethesda, they go to Town Center. But when you look at this and you really analyze our city, are our residents thinking Rockville first? That is the essential question because if they are not thinking Rockville first, then our city is hurting. That's the part that has to be because cities have a heart and soul. That part of it is, I want people going to Rockville. I want them to be there first, I want there to be no other destination. If they have to go someplace else, we'll figure why they went someplace else. But that is not what's happening. How do I know that this isn't happening? Because we've had to relook at Town Center all too often. We're doing our best to look at Town Center constantly and the pandemic didn't help, but our recovery and our moving forward is going to require all of us. If we leave out groups for whatever purpose, for whatever reason, however it shakes out, that is going to cost us in a social context. It is going to have a measurement maybe so profound and we cannot
continue going four years with an election where some of the pieces I've already mentioned we're not addressing and going forward to do that. So, I see it as a social aspect in terms of the human concept and behavior by loyalty to a community. I also see it as an economic sustainability. I see it as our responsibility to figure out a way to get other diverse groups and improve on the good things we've done so far. So, I would definitely keep in the mail voting. Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Next, Ms. Wolawsky.

MS. WOLAWSKY: That's an old hand. I apologize.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Alrighty. Thank you. Mr. Fisher.

MR. FISHER: I have nothing more at this point.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Alright, No hand. Mr. Ulton your hand is still up. Did you want to say anything else?

MR. ULTON: I applaud all of you for --
my hand was not up. I think it was up from before so, but I'll just say I admire all of you on the Commission and what you're trying to do. I applaud the mayor and council they do to try and pull us together. I think we'd do better by looking at this and bringing in different ways of doing that, so. Sorry, that part.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: No need to apologize. Thank you.

SHERRYL: Is there anyone else on as attendees that would like to speak or would like to comment on any other of the charter review commission's scope of work?

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Sherryl, I have an owner, that's the name that pops up, so I'm going to open the mike.

SHERRYL: Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes. Owner your mike is open.

MS. NEWMAN: Are you talking to me? Can you hear me?

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Yes, we can hear
you.

MS. NEWMAN: Very good, that wasn't my name but that's fine. Well, I'm Lois Newman and I sent in a couple of comments many of which have been stated by other people and I'm not going to repeat them. But I do agree with the idea of districts voting being very well researched and very controversial. It's not as easy as it sounds and it's not necessarily going to go turnout the way you think it will where more people from more districts will vote. It's quite possible you might have someone win by 25 votes which may or may not be enough.

I would like to suggest to think about putting a committee under the city manager's office to work with candidates. One of the things that can be an issue is candidates don't know what to do after they've been declared to be a candidate. They know how to become a candidate but then what? It is not appropriate for the Board of Supervisors for Elections to answer those questions because after all all the board is
trying to remain very impartial, very neutral and really has very little to do with candidates other than the campaign finance reports which is necessary for all candidates. So, to help people decide they want to be a candidate which I believe is an issue. I think people don't know about running, don't know what it means to run, don't know how important it is to serve government. We may need to consider training for candidates, training to be a candidate, how does one become a candidate, why does one become a candidate? And then sort of a tether to the city through the city mayor's office and again not through the supervisors of elections, it's inappropriate - but to work with candidates to answer questions. Example, how do I put up a sign? Can I put up a sign? How do I put up information on the website? What information is appropriate for me to put on the website? Where do candidates get answers to those questions? Right now there's nobody. There's no way for candidates, other than to read the materials which things are within the materials,
but there is an awful lot coming at a candidate when they're trying to get their campaign together. So, I think there should be a way, for potential candidates to get information to encourage them to run. If that happens and there's a lot of outreach for them in that perspective, you won't need districts because there'll be more people coming from more districts and representing more districts to run and then, there needs to be an effort to encourage the people in those districts to vote. So, just because you have somebody representing a district does not mean you'll see the turnout.

So, I think to keep it simple, this would be a simple thing to do, rather than converting the entire ballot to districts putting two or more and creating officials to represent the districts and having candidates run for districts which has a lot of steps to it and can be fairly complicated and may not give you the result that you're looking for. I see this as an easy solution and to a problem that has existed
for quite some time. So, I thank you for your ears and best of luck.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you so much.

Commissioner Valeri.

MS. VALERI: I was wondering if you could open up her mike again? I actually had a question for Miss Newman.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Yes ma'am.

MS. VALERI: If she is amenable to that.

MS. NEWMAN: Go on.

MS. VALERI: Good evening. I'm wondering when we're looking at the issue of representative districts, you touched on what effect it would have on turnout. How would you think it would affect the overall election as far as increasing geographic diversity of candidates or people looking to run?

MS. NEWMAN: Say the first part again.

How --what was the first part?

MS. VALERI: Sorry--

MS. NEWMAN: How do I think keeping it as it is?
MS. VALERI: Oh no, I meant as far as representative districts--

MS. NEWMAN: Yes.

MS. VALERI: --not looking at it, excuse me not looking at it from a turnout perspective, but looking at it from a geographic diversity perspective when it comes to the candidates who are running or for the individuals who win an election. Do you feel that districts would increase our geographic diversity in who gets selected.

MS. NEWMAN: Not necessarily. I don't think so. I think it can be done. By talking to people personally, by going to the different districts, having a session on: so you want to be a candidate? Would you might be interested in becoming a candidate and having a face to face and a person to person contact with people in districts or certain regions, can be a specific district but it can also be a particular part of the city and then encourage people to run. I don't think just because you create a district, people
are going to say, okay now I'm going to run and
I'm going to represent whatever it is I'm supposed
to representing. I think that can be done by
personal contact, by going to the districts, by
home association meetings for example, and
encourage talking to people about running for
office.

The other thing that occurred to me with
your question is just because someone represents
-- is elected by a district does not mean they're
true to their districts. It is possible to live in
a district but be on top of everything that is
going on in that district. Conversely, it is
possible to elected to represent that district,
not by district system but represent that district
and to be very concerned about what's going on in
there. I don't think districts -- I just don't
think districts are the answer.

MS. VALERI: Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. No more
hands up. We also encourage you to take the
survey, that's right on the side, the slide
survey. We'd love your feedback there as well.

SHERRYL: Okay, if there are no more participants that want to speak tonight then I'll offer closing remarks from our chair Mr. Fred Evans.

SPEAKER: There are two hands that just went up.

SHERRYL: Okay.


SHERRYL: Open their mikes? Yes.

Mr. EVANS: I see-- making a Joe.

JOE: I see, I'm going to ask council member Ashton (phonetic) to speak.

MS. ASHTON: I just want to say thank you. I just wanted to not influence or say any comments on this conversation cause I think there are a lot of perspectives and I just wanted a lot of those ideas to be free flowing. I just want to thank this Charter of Review Commission for the thorough outreach that you're doing and everyone who has been participating in this discussion that helps us make this city better. Thank you.
MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: Thank you. Mr. Gillespie.

MR. GILLESPIE: Hi. I don't have much to add. I also just wanted to say thank you. I did have one more thing I guess. That is if it's suggested that we ultimately move to having representative districts, I would again strongly encourage this commission to take a look and the questions about what choice in terms of our voting. I would agree with that or take that a step further and seek another sort of endorsing method. So, that's all I had to add.

SHERRYL: Thank you. Ms. Ferrell.

MS. TAYLOR-FERRELL: I'm going to try to run that over to Mr. Evans for your closing remarks. Again, I want to thank all of the participants tonight and for their input and we want to let you know that that survey that was in the chat is also available on the city's website and it will be open until March 25th. Thank you.

MR. EVANS: Thank you Ms. Ferrell. Thank you. Danny, You did a great job. I appreciate all
the feedback. I want to introduce one final member of our commission, John Becker who is with us this evening. Great to see you John.

    MR. BECKER: Great to see everyone.

    Great to see you.

    MR. EVANS: On behalf of the Charter Review Commission, I give a big heartfelt thank you to each of you for your committed participation to this town hall meeting. We would review every suggestion as we prepare our final recommendations to Rockville's city mayor and council members. Additionally, we encourage each of you to inform your city neighbors and friends about the work of the Commission. Please, encourage them to participate and see our questionnaire which is located on the city's website which is the rockvillemd.gov, and then the site is Charter Review Commission. You'll be able to find it relatively easily. Finally, if you have any additional suggestions or comments, do not hesitate to forward them to the commission's webpage. Once again, from my heart, I thank all
of you for your participation, the commissioners, all other folks who joined us tonight and it was a very great positive, conductive meeting and we look forward to the hard work as we proceed. Thank you very much.

So, we can leave Danny?

(Whereupon, the PROCEEDINGS were adjourned.)

* * * * *

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5 * * * * *
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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

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