

**BLUE RIBBON ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Wednesday, February 21, 2018**  
**5:30 P.M.**

**Committee Members Present:** Drozdowski, Schwarz, Hanner, Champlin, Godfrey, Andrews, Antaya, Helmboldt, Burleson, Burton, Settles, Whitfield, Weaver, Tomak, Fortney, Johnson, Moreno (via conference)

**Committee Members Absent:** Squires, McIlroy

**Others Present:** Jill Steele, City Attorney: Rebecca Fleury, City Manager: Vicki Houser, City Clerk

**Call to Order:** Mr. Schwarz called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** A motion was made by Mr. Godfrey, supported by Mr. Andrews, to approve the February 21, 2018 meeting minutes. All yes, none opposed. Motion approved.

**Public Comment:**

Steve Johnkoski, 23320 Uldriks Drive, suggested the room set-up be reconfigured, also recommending additional buses run on election days.

John Kennefick, 234 South Ave., commented about past Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee meetings in 2004, expressed concerns with public attendance and actions of the committee, stating they did not follow Robert's Rules of Order.

**A. Committee Discussion**

Dr. Schwarz noted the City's precinct and ward maps were posted for review to assist the committee members with considerations. Dr. Schwarz also referred to the chart of municipalities that was provided at the previous meeting.

Attorney Steele noted the City Commission currently does not have staggered terms, stating they currently have 2-year terms, noting all commissioners are elected at the same time. Attorney Steele also noted committee members motioned, and received support, for Robert's Rules of Order and the time limitations on public comment.

Dr. Schwarz stated he was on the commission at the time of the merger of the city and township of Battle Creek. Dr. Schwarz asked the committee if they wanted to consider staggered commission terms.

Committee members discussed concerns that if no standing commissioners were reelected, the entire commission could be overturned; expressing concerns this may cause issues with the administration of responsibilities to the city and the community. Members also acknowledged the committee would need to consider which commissioners would be voted for a 4-year term in 2020, possibly the At-Large commissioners, and which would be voted for a 2-year term in 2020, with a vote for 4-year terms in 2022, possibly the Ward commissioners, thus staggering the commission terms.

Committee members also discussed recent ordinance amendments that changed the election of city commissioners from odd to even years, resulting in cost savings for the city, and the possibility of increased voter participation.

Committee members considered the need to evaluate all of the possible Charter amendments before making a final determination on each as they may have an impact on another consideration.

Members considered putting items for consideration into a “Parking Lot”, or set aside, so that the committee could consider how all of the items fit together, to be merged into a final decision and recommendation to the City Commission. Members noted the purpose of the “parking lot” is to save a place for issues in consideration of all other determinations. Members also noted it was important that the changes to the Charter encourage more voter participation. Committee members considered low voter turnout during August primary elections.

Committee members expressed concerns that greater voter turnout will occur during Presidential election years, while lower voter turnout historically occurs during Gubernatorial election years. Members discussed the possibility of only one ward in the city, with all At-Large Commissioners.

Attorney Steele provided information to the committee relative to several municipalities’ experiences with council terms, staggered terms and election of mayor. Attorney Steele reported proposals to make charter changes occurred in Michigan municipalities in the last 10 years at the following rates: 2007 -161; 2008 – 57; 2009 – 130; 2010 – 78; 2011 – 72; 2012 – 80; 2013 – 48; 2014 – 100; 2015 – 64; 2016 – 114 and 2017 – 27. Attorney Steele stated the handout only included municipalities that were similar to Battle Creek, considering the same issues, stating the voters passed most of the proposals. Attorney Steele also referenced the numerous changes made by the City of Kalamazoo in 2014, including the direct election of the mayor.

Committee members agreed to discuss the issues they were charged with, considering the pros and cons of each, along with the impact on the City. Members suggested the group should come to agreement what items are placed on the “Parking Lot,” stating it could be determined with a vote of the committee.

Committee members also discussed not staggering the election of the commissioners, stating it may be the will of the people to overturn the entire commission due to dissatisfaction. Members also suggested the council may have staggered terms when a commissioner is not reelected.

**A motion was made by Mr. Godfrey, supported by Ms. Drozdowski, to place the question of staggered commission election terms on the “parking lot” for later discussion.**

**Yes:** Weaver, Drozdowski, Hanner, Burton, Godfrey, Schwarz, Burleson, Tomak, Settles, Helmboldt, Johnson, Andrews

**No:** Whitfield, Antaya, Champlin, Moreno

**Motion approved**

Committee members discussed the current ward system in place in Battle Creek, with 5 wards, and the possibility of only one ward, with all At-Large commissioners. Members discussed the advantages of having numerous ward commissioners, giving residents of particular wards a representative living in their area that they are comfortable speaking with, keeping city government accessible, ensuring a “seat at the table” for all residents. Members also noted ward commissioners, although representing one area of the city, vote on decisions that affect all city residents. Members discussed a balanced representation with ward and at-large council members. Members considered the make-up of the wards, stating they should be reflective of an area or neighborhood, noting some wards are very divided, with one member stating 7 wards may better represent neighborhoods. Members expressed concern neighborhoods with low voter turnout would not have council representation without wards and that at-large candidates would focus their efforts on areas with high voter turnout. Members noted it was important that candidates reach out to all residents, stating only one ward may lead to candidates who only campaign in higher voter turnout areas.

Attorney Steele noted out of 20 municipalities with populations ranging from 41,000 to 84,000, 15 have only one ward, while 3 have a mixture of ward and at-large council members, while 2 have only ward council members. Attorney Steele agreed to contact the City of Kalamazoo to determine the reasons they considered a change to their charter and inquire as their experience after the changes were approved by the voters. Attorney Steele noted the Home Rule City Act addressed wards.

**A motion was made by Mr. Champlin, supported by Ms. Drozdowski, to place the topic of number/characteristics of wards on the parking lot. All yes, none opposed. Motion approved.**

## **B. Survey Draft and Web Portal**

Ms. Fleury provided the draft survey to the members, asking that they review for discussion at the next meeting, also noting one person could take the survey multiple times from different IP addresses, stating there is a demographic question on the survey. Ms. Fleury also noted staff has tried to use a web portal and individual committee email in the past, noting it presented some difficulties, instead recommending the public be encouraged to submit ideas to [publicinfo@battlecreekmi.gov](mailto:publicinfo@battlecreekmi.gov). Ms. Fleury confirmed all of the committee information would be placed on the city website.

Doctor Schwarz recommended committee members could add a topic the agenda if it was consistent with the committee's responsibilities, while Mr. Burleson recommended members submit their agenda recommendations in a timely manner. Dr. Schwarz also asked members to inform Ms. Fleury if they did not want their email address made public.

Attorney Steele noted a committee member's recommendation to add changes to the city seal was not part of the charter, rather it was an ordinance, and not under the committee's responsibility.

Ms. Fleury informed the committee that Ms. Fortney, an original appointee, resigned, and her position was filled with Erik Johnson.

### **Public Comment:**

Don Bradstreet, Beckwith Ave, expressed concerns with the 3 minute time limit on public comment.

Pat Graw, 23 Maurer, expressed her preference the city continue with ward candidates, stating the areas take pride in being part of something.

Dan Boyd, 127 Eastway Place, expressed concern the elimination of wards may risk representation of residents in some areas, encouraging members to consider future generations when making decisions.

Anthony Barnes, 43 East Ave., requested the information presented to the committee be made available to the public.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, March 7, 2018 at DPW Multi-purpose Room, at 5:30 pm.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m.