

MINUTES
DEKALB COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
MALOOF AUDITORIUM
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

i. **CALL TO ORDER: 6:05 p.m.**

ii. **ROLL CALL**

Steve Henson, Chairman ^{CBH}
Virginia Harris, Vice Chairman
Claudette Leak
Lance Hammonds
Robert Wittenstein
Bobbie Sanford
Dr. Gerald Austin, Sr.
Jim Grubiak
John Turner
Mary Hinkel
Clara DeLay
Vickie Turner

ABSENT:

Karen Bennett
Susan Neugent
Dwight Thomas
Representative Karla Drenner
Senator Emanuel Jones

STAFF:

Zachary Williams, Chief Operating Officer
Barbara Sanders-Norwood, County Clerk

iii. **MINUTES FROM THE AUGUST 4, 2022 MEETING**

MOTION was made by Robert Wittenstein and seconded by Virginia Harris to approve the Minutes of the August 4, 2022 meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Henson stated that this is the Commission's first public hearing, and we are here to listen to the citizens and hear their concerns. We will give each person three minutes to speak in the process. If you have longer presentations and want to present written information to us, we will accept that. At the conclusion, we will tell you where you can find us at the DeKalb County Charter Review Commission website. Each of the members will receive a copy of any item that you care to share.

The CEO created this commission because he has a deep concern that DeKalb County is run as well as it can be run. We will be studying the County Organizational Act and making sure it is effective and serving the needs of the citizens.

We have no legal action that we take as far as changing things. Our process will be recommendations to the County Commission, the General Assembly, and to the public on things that may be improved or changed.

Davis Fox – Ridgewood Drive, Decatur. Thanked the Commission for this important job. The functions that DeKalb County is providing are vitally important to every one of us, our health and our life. Without these services, we don't exist. We want cost efficient, effective services. It's not about politics. It's just about getting the best services that we can get. Mr. Davis stated that he hopes the Commission will look for ways for our government to collaborate and stay away from conflict. We need people and government, elected officials, citizens, cities and counties to collaborate and work together, not set up systems of conflict.

Muhammad Jihad – 604 Fayetteville Road, Decatur. He stated that he had two concerns. (1) He is an entrepreneur and runs a business at 566 Fayetteville Road by the name of Spring Greens at Community Café. There is a public road named Alexander Road which begins as asphalt and then it transitions to a dirt road. DeKalb County Sanitation picks up the restaurant trash in the back on Alexander Road. Unfortunately, since the road is run down, when it rains, it becomes really muddy, and the trucks tend to get stuck. He was told that they can't pick up the trash. To facilitate this, he personally paid to have gravel placed on the road so that the trucks could travel back there. (2) He also has property at 604 Fayetteville Road and can't seem to get the trees and bushes in the public right-of-way removed. He's talked with Roads & Drainage and the Planning Department, and been passed to other departments, but no one can tell him the process for getting the road repaired and the right of way cleared. No one seems to know the process.

Jocelyn O'Neal – She expressed concerns about Section 8 housing properties. Prior to someone moving into the properties someone comes out to make sure that everything is in place for the occupants to come in. After that there are no more inspections. She has gone to the Atlanta Housing meetings and they won't tell you, but at one time they only had one inspector for DeKalb County. Now they are supposed to have hired outside contractors. There should be some type of inspection done so that these properties are kept up to code. Also, outside contractors are used by utility companies on projects so we have broken poles and hanging wires left and large metal plates left on the roads. This impacts the look of our county. Also, these plates stay on the road's way too long and the gravel they place around them comes loose and the plates move. She thinks they could use orange transition strips instead that are easier on cars. We pay these companies, and they should be helping to protect our vehicles. And why isn't more done with businesses that are repeat offenders cited by Code Enforcement? She gave an

example on Covington Highway that she has reported to the County. The business is nasty and there is continual crime there. In other counties, they wouldn't get away with this stuff, but they do in DeKalb County. Repeat offenders should be shut down and banished from doing business in the County. Also, what about the Arborists' role with trees? She thinks the arborist goes out to new developments to review trees, but what do we do to identify dangerous trees? Recently, a tree fell and killed a child. She thought we should have summits again where people can talk directly with department staff.

HONORABLE KATHIE GANNON, 335 West Ponce de Leon, Decatur. She is appreciative of having a Charter Review Commission. She expressed her desire to have more public education about the Organizational Act. She stated that when she was doing work with the Blueprint Process to review the Charter, it became an educational experience regarding the different forms of government. Citizens don't know how county government works and the legislators don't know because it is very different. There are a lot of different powers and duties and roles and responsibilities. It is important to educate citizens, so they have an informed opinion. One other thing that she wants the Commission to look at in that regard is the accountability and responsibilities of the different departments that deliver services to our citizens because they aren't accountable to citizens. They only work for the CEO. If citizens don't know how to get something done, they call their elected officials and expect them to get it done. However, that is not their role or responsibility under the Organizational Act, even though she had a full-time person in her office devoted to providing constituent services. I would like you to look at other counties to identify any effective means and methods they are using to provide services. She also stated she will be sending a list of recommendations to the Charter Review Commission.

Faye Lyons-Gary, 2267 Whites Mill Road, Decatur. She stated that a commission that has no effect and puts nothing into place is just another waste of time, and we don't need that now. We've seen the effectiveness of things when they're done based on data and have a process with a timetable of action, milestones, measurable results and citizen education. I'm with the League of Women Voters but I'm here as a private citizen. I had an issue with Watershed when they kept telling me I had a \$1,000 bill for only two people in my house. I had to call my county commissioner to get it straightened out. We don't need that. We need effective, efficient government and whatever form of government it takes to do that.

Chairman Henson – I am very grateful for all our speakers. I want you to know that this is not our first meeting. This is our first public hearing because of the Covid situation primarily. We have met by ZOOM several times. You can reach each of these meetings online and review them.

Later you will be introduced to members of the Carl Vinson institute who will assist this Commission. The other meetings have been focused on listening to the County Attorney and going over the Charter and knowing what changes happened in the past and what might be going on in the future just to correspond with State Law.

There was one person who did not make it for public health reasons but was able to send his testimony to our Secretary and I will allow it to be read.

Stephen Binney, 1083 Seville Road, Clarkston, Georgia. Mr. Binney thanked County Attorney Viviane Ernstes for her line-by-line explanation of the Org Act. He also expressed concerns about the Audit Board and its lack of a Chief Audit Officer for almost a year. At the audit oversight meeting last week, it

was shown that a number of audits done in 2018 had not been satisfactorily settled after four years. He suggested some changes in Section 10 to put a time limit on when audit recommendations must be implemented by departments. Section 22 of the Act discusses ethics and is the single longest section of the Org Act. It has taken over nine months to hire a new chief ethics officer. The setting of the Board of Commissioner's agenda process needs to be looked at very closely. Currently, the CEO appears to have control over what gets put on the agenda. Commission walk-ons are a process that needs to be addressed. It has been abused in the past. Your By-Laws seem to be influenced by CEO Thurmond. Also, I noticed that the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board are CEO Thurmond's appointees. Over the meetings I have watched, a regular item has been a presentation from a County department head, senior services, IT, and tonight fire. Nowhere in the Org Act are rules for these departments discussed.

Your job is to propose changes as to how DeKalb County government might function in the future. You might want to consider dropping these presentations in the future so that you have more time to spend on the job that the Board has been assigned.

INTRODUCTION OF INVITED GUEST – Darnell Fullum – Chief of Fire and Rescue

The Chairman called on Chief Fullum to review the services of DeKalb County Fire and Rescue. He stated that Chief Fullum has been here about eight years and he has done an outstanding job. We look forward to him presenting some of the innovations that the fire department has been working on in the past and where we're headed in the future.

Chief Fullum passed out copies of his presentation and mentioned the Vision and Mission statements. There are currently 824 funded positions. Of those, 725 are firefighters. We also have 52 paramedics and EMT's only. These are individuals who are not firefighters. Chief Fullum stated that they serve the County through 26 stations. The only area that they do not serve is here in the seat of Decatur. They have their own fire department. The portion of Atlanta that is in the county is served by the City of Atlanta fire department.

Chief Fullum advised the Commission that they have an ISO rating of 2. The rating goes from 1 to 10 with 1 being the best and we currently have a 2.

Chairman Henson asked Chief Fullum to explain ISO.

Chief Fullum stated that ISO stands for Insurance Service Office. When they rate a fire department, this is one of the elements in determining the cost of insurance for your home or property.

Another key point is we provide many services outside of fire. We provide emergency medical services. We also have the dive team, swift water team, hazmat team, forestry team and confined space personnel. The Fire Marshall's office provides inspection services and fire investigation services. The tactical medics are used with the SWAT team of the police department.

Chief Fullum played a video which demonstrated the public safety services that the Fire department provides. They work with schools and civic and faith-based organizations to reinforce good safety habits as well as the benefits of smoke alarms and fire sprinklers. Many of their programs are grant funded and through those partnerships and others, they have some impressive tools for teaching safety including the fire safety house and kitchen fire simulator. The DCFR public education unit works for you by reducing risk within the community wherever they find it.

Chairman Henson – Thank you Chief Fullum for your presentation. We appreciate your service very much and that of all your staff. They risk their lives to make sure we're safe.

One thing we want to focus on is the Organizational Act and the government. We need to know who you think your boss is, who is your boss, your relationship with the COO, CEO, the commissioners, and maybe how you feel about your budget. Who do you go to? To the Commissioners? Do you go to the CEO? That sort of thing.

Chief Fullum:

As far as my boss, there is a public safety director, Jack Lumpkin, who I directly report to. And then he and I can talk with the COO and CEO and the Board of Commissioners.

We submit our budget just like all the rest of the departments whether it is at the beginning of the year or mid-year. That budget is sent up, if you will, through the public safety director to the COO. We get a ton of support from the CEO and from the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Henson – Any questions from any of the Commissioners?

Mary Hinkel – Are you aware of any structural deficiencies in our form of government that inhibit you from doing the best work you can following best practices in your area of expertise? If you can't answer, I'd like you to think about that question and feed us any answer alter. You can go to the website. We'll have a "contact us" place.

It seems to me all the department heads – I would love to know that you're looking out at best practices around the country and that you're trying to emulate the innovation, emulate those things. Is there anything that in our structure, our charter, that's preventing you from doing that?

Chief Fullum – I can say tonight, no, there is nothing that prevents me from doing that. I think, you know, some of the examples I showed in the presentation, the rapid response vehicles were something that we had kicked around, if you will, in the department.

When it was brought to the CEO when we were talking about the SPLOST, it was immediately put in there are part of that program. And so that was an initiative that was born in the department, brought to the CEO, and then we found a way to fund it. It is up and running now.

Robert Wittenstein – Thank you for your service to the County. I am curious about the process for deciding what the millage rate should be. Who has to approve that? Does all the money make it to you? How much of your budget does that account for? Give us some sense of how all that works if you would.

Chief Fullum – So far as the separation, we have two funds that we do receive money from. The vast majority is the fire fund that you're speaking of. There is a very small portion of our budget that comes from the general fund. That is used to the salaries of the paramedics and the EMTs I spoke of because that service is available to the entire county. As far as does all the money make it? I see what everybody else sees and once again, I have a ton of support in anything that we have brought forward as those initiatives or ideas. As it relates to how it is established, that's not something that I have been part of as far as establishing whether it is going to go up or down in the movement.

Chairman Henson – Any other questions? Mr. Hammonds.

Lance Hammonds – Thank you for your service. Where does the authority come for the fire departments and fire service in a city or a county? I can't imagine not having a fire department. Does that come from the State legislature and says every area has to have so many trucks and people?

Chief Fullum – In my opinion, that is a decision that is made by the citizens and those that are put in charge to make the final decision. Now, as far as the fire department itself, to be a firefighter in the State of Georgia, you have to be a state certified firefighter. So, we do have to subscribe to their rules as it relates to yearly training, which there's a lot of that to be recertified every year. There are also stipulations about the code. The fire code is approved by the State and we must follow the code.

Chairman Henson – Ms. Turner.

On behalf of all the little ones in the County, I say thank you. I have been uniquely aware of what you do for our children. I've visited many of the stations and taken students there and it's always a joy to see what the firemen are doing in the house. Thank you and I hope that message gets to them.

One of the slides has DeKalb County Fire Rescue Academy. Where is that located?

Chief Fullum – It's off Candler Road close to the mall on Warren Road.

Vickie Turner – One of your slides says, "We are Hiring." What are your requirements to be a firefighter other than probably some kind of academy training? How long is the process?

Chief Fullum – There are state minimums for being a firefighter that do include being 18 years old, have a high school diploma or GED, and not having had a felony in the last ten years. Those are the baseline requirements.

In DeKalb County, we're very proud of the fact that we will take a person who has no training and train them. We will take you from not having any certifications to first going through EMT school which is 20 weeks and then through the fire academy which is another 20 weeks.

Chairman Henson – Mr. Williams.

Zachary Williams, COO – I just wanted to get back to Mr. Wittenstein's questions. I don't know if it was specifically answered regarding the funds that we see on our tax bills. All funds related to the fire fund go directly to the fire department to pay for their operational costs as well as reserve for capital or typically for capital plus reserves. The budget is determined based on the needs that are presented by the Chief. Each of the department heads, when we develop the budget, they send in, "here's what we need" you know, whether it's for growth, staffing or so forth. We review that, and in instances like police and fire where they have their own millage rate, we ensure that the millage rate is sufficient to meet their needs.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Henson – I want to thank the CEO and COO and the Commission. We have with us today the Carl Vinson representatives.

We need staff to look into issues, to study questions from members of the Commission, to look at what other counties and other states do. So, the CEO and Board of Commissioners were very gracious in extending a contract to Carl Vinson to provide us with staff. If you have questions that you want to

present to the staff, please send them to either Vice Chair Virginia Harris or myself. If there are a lot of questions, we might have to triage it or prioritize.

At this time, I would like to introduce you to Ms. Brill, and she will tell us about her background.

Lori Brill – My name is Lori Brill and I have 20 plus years in local and state government. I have worked with the Secretary of State's office and the legislative counsel's office. I have also worked with DeKalb County in their Law Department, so I am very familiar with a lot of the people here and also your Organizational Act. I am now currently with the Carl Vinson Institute which is a public service organizational institute that has been around for about 95 years now.

I am in the Strategic operations and planning assistance division, which is a fancy way of saying local government. I particularly do a lot of work with charters, ordinances for small towns, reviewing them and making suggestions. We also provide applied research and technical assistance to local governments, strategic planning, and organizational and operational reviews. We are basically here for any needs you have whether its surveys, research, assisting with taking notes, whatever it is you need. At the end, we will put together a report for the Commission.

My legal intern is Ambico Marshal. She's from Chicago but she did go to school down here. She went to Clark Atlanta. She is a big White Sox fan. She was summa cum laude at Clark Atlanta which is in the top 2 percent of her graduating class which I find impressive. She has done psychology-based research at various conferences, which I think in a way might be helpful. She has also been involved in a lot of collegiate organizations and programs. She is currently in her second year of law school.

Claudette Leak – Could you summarize the scope of what you will be doing on our behalf?

Lori Brill – We will be attending meetings, providing staffing support, whether it is a meeting or otherwise. At public hearings, I'm documenting what is going on at the public hearings so that you are aware of the citizens' concerns. We will be conducting research and interviews, should you need them, with various department heads and the Board of Commissioners.

Jim Grubiak – At some point we'll be looking at specific proposals. There will be some pros and cons of each perhaps and maybe differences of opinion. Are you going to be available to help us facilitate that discussion?

Lori Brill – Yes. I will facilitate meetings where we're asked to. I am going to follow Senator Henson's lead and I will also be reviewing all the data and presenting it to you. Doing whatever studies, you would like us to do and maybe, if you like, developing a series of benchmarks, if that is helpful.

Chairman Henson – Are there any more questions? If not, we will be doing the next meeting, if there are no objections from the Committee, on ZOOM. It will be done on Thursday, October 6, 2022.

Mary Hinkel – Hopefully, we will have the lawyers back to continue our review of the Organizational Act.

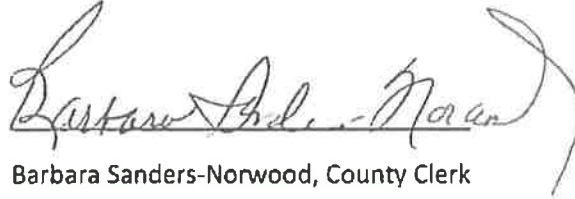
Chairman Henson – Thanks to our Chair of the DeKalb County School System for allowing us to have our next Public Hearing on November 3rd in their administrative headquarters on Mountain Industrial Boulevard, which is in Commission District 4.

If there is no other discussion, I'll take a motion to adjourn.

MOTION moved and seconded to adjourn.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen B Henson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Steve Henson, Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Sanders-Norwood". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Barbara Sanders-Norwood, County Clerk