

# DEKALB COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

DECEMBER 14, 2023

MALOOF AUDITORIUM

MINUTES

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**II. ROLL CALL**

Steve Henson, Chairman

Virginia Harris, Vice Chairperson

Mary Hinkel, Secretary

Karen Bennett

Claudette Leak

Sen. Sally Harrell

Lance Hammonds

Robert Wittenstein

Susan Neugent

Bobbie Sanford

Dr. Gerald Austin Sr.

Jim Grubiak

Dwight Thomas

John Turner

**ABSENT:**

Clara DeLay

Vickie Turner

**STAFF:**

Zachary Williams – Chief Operating Officer

Viviane Ernstes – County Attorney

Barbara Sanders-Norwood – County Clerk

Carl Vinson Institute Staff

### **III. MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

Minutes from two meetings (October 5 and October 12) and two public hearings (September 14 and November 9) were approved by unanimous vote.

### **IV. INTRODUCTION OF INVITED GUESTS**

The Chair recognized Judge Ramsey and Tax Commissioner Johnson.

CEO Michael Thurmond expressed his appreciation for the work of the Commission and thanked commission members and the Carl Vinson Institute for successfully completing their service.

### **V. REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair remarked on the process to follow the presentation of the Commission's report to the CEO, Board of Commissioners, and the DeKalb Delegation. He reminded the public that the Commission's recommendations still need to be acted upon by the DeKalb Delegation and citizens as well as commission members should feel free to communicate with their legislative representatives concerning their thoughts about the recommendations.

### **VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Discussion and consideration of changes of Sections 11, 14, and 27 that address earlier amendments to those sections of the Organizational Act.

Section 11: In light of the letter from the Audit Oversight Committee Chair, the Commission deleted proposed subsection (j)7 (concerning department benchmarking) in its entirety. **Vote:** 11 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstentions

Section 14: Rewording of the last two sentences of subsection 14(b) (Powers and duties of the chief executive): Such request shall be responded to by the chief executive, or his or her designee, in a timely fashion. If the chief executive denies or fails to respond to a

commissioner's request, the chief executive shall provide the requesting commissioner with a written explanation for his or her response or lack thereof. **Vote:** 11 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstentions

Section 27: Clarified the Open records officer paragraph by deleting "maintaining records for all open records requests and responses" since records are maintained by departments and added "to the extent authorized by law," the open records office shall have the exclusive authority to receive open records requests. This means the Open records officer is responsible for all written requests, as verbal requests can still be made to others. **Vote:** 11 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstentions

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

Lori Brill of the Carl Vinson Institute thanked the Commission for its work and referred to materials provided to the Commission in folders: Table of Contents, List of Tables, Organizational Act Edits, and the Appendix Table of Contents

Commissioner Leak commented on the report being the first step in this process and encouraged the public to speak with their legislators about acting on the report at the General Assembly.

Recognition of Participants: The Chair thanked the Vice Chair and Secretary for their service and Commission members for their attendance and work for some 18 months of service. The Commission presented and adopted a resolution recognizing DeKalb citizen Stephen Binney for his consistent attendance at the meetings and hearings of the Charter Review Commission.

## **VIII. REMARKS OF INTERESTED CITIZENS/PUBLIC COMMENT**

Stephen Binney: Good Evening Charter Review Members, First off I hope that you all have taken the time to read and digest Dr. Ed Williams' public comments from last week. He is a person with a deep knowledge of both Dekalb County and State of Georgia law and regulations. His questions are worth listening to and his suggestions are worth considering before putting this final version of a Charter on the next stage towards a referendum. Especially the parts about whether this Charter is in danger of allowing the CEO to be a king. We all know that the current

and potential future form of Dekalb County will not allow an equal distribution of power between the CEO and the County Commission but one of the goals of this process is to bring the distribution of county power a step or two closer towards being equal.

As we come to the end of the first leg of our journey towards an improved Dekalb County government I want to say that I have applied to be appointed to many Boards and Commissions in this county and have never been appointed to one. Only twice have I been truly disappointed. When I applied to be on the Ethics Board and when I applied through numerous channels to be appointed to this Charter Review Commission. Even though I was not appointed to either one I have tried my best to attend each one's meetings on a continuing basis.

However, I must admit that, unlike the Ethics Board, all the Charter Review Members here tonight have done as good of, if not a better, of a job as I could have done and your efforts are greatly appreciated.

I had many ideals and hopes for the final version of a new Dekalb Charter, most of which are not in this final product. However, I do realize that the road to heaven, hell, or home starts with a single step and I am grateful that the journey has started and am hopeful that in a decade or two we will reach our final destination.

This is not the end but the beginning as these and many other things can be changed during the upcoming processes as our County Charter continues to be rewritten to be approved by the Dekalb County Legislative Delegation and finally voted on by the citizens of Dekalb County.

I encourage and invite all Dekalb County residents, regardless of your views, whether you want more changes or like things as they are, to bring your ideas and suggestions to the CEO's office, the County Commission, and the Dekalb Legislative Delegation.

Your input during the ongoing and upcoming Charter Review process will be one of the most important things you can do for yourself, your children and loved ones, your friends and neighbors, and all of us in Dekalb County.

Finally, I want to wish everyone here, regardless of your race, color, creed, or religious belief system, the happiest of holiday seasons. Take some time off. You deserve it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **IX. COMMISSION STATUS/ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission's remit expires at the end of the year. The Commission has requested that the Commission's website remain accessible to the public through 2024 and 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.