



County of Allegheny

436 GRANT STREET ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15219

Government Review Commission of Allegheny County

Minutes: Tuesday, September 29, 2015
5:39 p.m. – 6:36 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call: All members were present except for Commissioners Oliphant and McCants-Lewis
3. Opening Remarks by the Chair: Chairman Foerster highlighted that the meeting calendar has been amended to include a public meeting on Thursday, January 21, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. in the Gold Room of the Courthouse. As such, he emphasized that draft recommendations will be due for discussion at the December 15, 2015 meeting.

To achieve that end, the Chairman distributed revised calendars for both the full Commission and the three committees. Given the charge and new schedule, Commission Geraghty inquired about the requirement that the “working sessions” are governed by the Sunshine Act. It was noted by the Chairman that the Law Department had deemed this meetings to be subject to the Sunshine Act.

The Chair officially welcomed Elizabeth Tuttle who was representing the six (6) students from Duquesne University Law School that are lending their energies to this project. Ms. Tuttle did note that all students would attend the October meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes: After entertaining a motion of approval of the minutes, a motion was made by Commissioner Nowalk and seconded by Commissioner Geraghty. The minutes from August were passed unanimously.

5. Public Comment: One public comment was presented by Mr. Greg Yoest who proposed making the Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh an ex-officio member of County Council. Mr. Yoest contended that this action would facilitate city-county cooperation and enhance the involvement of municipal leaders in countywide decisions. In response, Commissioner Nowalk recommended that Mr. Yoest explore the work of "Connect" being organized by Dr. David Miller of the University of Pittsburgh. From a different perspective, Commissioner Schwartz noted that this proposal would be very challenging due to the guidelines of reapportionment. Additionally, he observed that the issue of gerrymandering would have to be addressed. With respect to governance, Commissioner Geraghty questioned the merits of the proposal as to the advantages that could be reaped from such an action. In response, Mr. Yoest proclaimed that he believed the proposal would increase political involvement from more leaders in the county.

6. Form of Government Committee Report:

The next three meetings (Sept., Oct., and Nov.) will be dedicated to formulating recommendations. Two members of the Committee recently met with the Duquesne University students assigned to this project, Maggie McGannon and Court Hower. The students were asked to research the following issues: budgets and salaries in other Home Rule communities in Pennsylvania and redistricting standards. The Committee scheduled three additional meetings with Maggie and Court to discuss their forthcoming research; the Committee is also awaiting responses from other committee chairs to ensure that the committees are not overlapping regarding the issues they are focusing on.

7. Fiscal and Personnel Committee Report

At the last Committee meeting, held on September 2, 2015 at 5 pm, the Committee heard from the Allegheny County Accountability, Conduct and Ethics Commission (ACE) on personnel Issues. Members of the Commission explained the issues they faced with ethics violations. In response, the Committee will be formulating recommendations on rewriting portions of the Administrative Code. The Committee also heard from the County Solicitor and Human Resources Department. Regarding this department, no specific issues were raised. The next Committee meeting will be held on October 5, 2015 at 5 pm.

8. External Entities, Reviews and Independently Elected Officials Committee Report

The last Committee meeting held on September 17, 2015 involved meeting with Controller Chelsea Wagner, Treasurer John Weinstein and Economic Development Director Bob Hurley. Mr. Weinstein made the Committee aware of the difficulty in costs associated with collecting delinquent tax from bars and restaurants. In response, the Committee may be able to advance a recommendation on this issue to the Commonwealth to allow for securing costs related to this activity as is done with delinquencies of real estate taxes. The Committee may also consider making a recommendation to improve the Diversity Audit system in regards to contractors and subcontractors. The Committee also received a report regarding the function of the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development. The Committee does not anticipate any major recommendations relating to this department.

9. Action items

Recommendations: If any individual committee is unable to attend a meeting, please email Executive and Council staff one hour prior to the meeting to ensure that the appropriate phone system is activated. This is particularly important as a dedicated phone line must be identified.