

Brooklyn Park Charter Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 7:00 p.m.
City Hall Room A203

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Present: Commissioners, Sunday Alabi, Barbara Bor, Amy Hanson, Adam Hunt, Dennis Secara, LaDawn Severin, Scott Simmons, Gregory Szach, David Williams;

Absent: Commissioners Susan Maberera, Berniece Otieno, Council Liaison Nichole Klonowski (excused).

2. Public Comment – None.

3. Additions/Approval of the Agenda of April 10, 2024

Commissioner Bor stated she would like to add a discussion on the Orientation for New Commissioners and the Charter Commission attendance to a Council Work Session to update the council about the Charter Commission. She stated there were new council members.

Motion Chair Secara, Second Commissioner Alabi to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 MARCH 13, 2024, REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Chair Secara added a sentence to Item 5.1 related to a clarification question by Council Member Klonowski, acting as the Council chair.

Motion Chair Secara, Second Commissioner Severin to approve the March 13, 2024, regular meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried. Commissioners Simmons and Hanson abstained.

5. Old Business

5.1 Charter Amendment to Section 4.03

Chair Secara started with Attachment 5.1E, Brooklyn Park Special Elections chart. He stated there had been 9 special elections in 23 years. The longest vacancies were for Mayor Lunde and Council Member Pha, both were 9 months. He stated Council Member Klonowski suggested the Charter Commission look into it and was an issue that needed to be addressed and the Council felt it was an issue. He stated the Council asked the Charter Commission to look into the possibility of shortening the vacancies and giving the Council the authority to appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy until a special election was held.

Commissioner Severin stated the first few special elections that happened many years ago were short and looked at the gaps, when the resignation was accepted, how quick the vacancy was declared, calling for a special election and all happened on the same day. She stated there were no primaries per a resolution and the two that took the 9 months were the only ones that had a Primary election. She stated there was 46 days of early voting because of state law, for a primary and regular election, and was 92 days of lost time. She stated it was a reality that the Primaries made everything slow. She stated the last three recent special elections, there were gaps, almost a month long between the resignation, declaring the vacancy, and calling for the special election

and was not sure what the delay was.

Commissioner Alabi stated on the two with the 9-month gaps, asked if the delay was because of the accepted resignation date and calling for the special elections in January.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the key factor in the delay was the early voting dates in conjunction with the specified dates to hold special elections.

Commissioner Simmons stated the Charter was amended to allow Council Member Lee, East District, to get elected in a special election. He stated the only two of the 23-year history of special elections that involved a special primary were in 2020 and 2022. He stated the two special elections were to replace the mayor and in the West District, Susan Pha was elected to the State Senate. He stated the other special elections did not have a primary. He stated what caused the delay was what the state legislature did and was not the fault of the Charter, otherwise there would have been a more expeditious and timely election process.

Commissioner Williams stated when there was not a primary the time limits were reduced and additional days for early voting came into the special elections. He stated the primary was a two-to-three-month process and if that could be eliminated it would be better off.

Commissioner Bor stated at the second reading of the ordinance there were questions and concerns and did not have the data presented tonight. She stated the Council reflected on Council Member Pha's delay. She stated some were not on the Council at the time and had experienced in terms of what they perceived an imbalanced of representation. She stated Council Klonowski felt the Charter Commission missed the boat on trying to shorten the process but was never discussed in terms of the chart presented tonight on what influenced the delay. She stated the Commissioners had an opportunity to educate themselves on the rationale for the delay.

Commissioner Alabi asked about the special elections without the primaries per resolution, if it was a jungle primary regardless of the number of candidates.

Chair Secara stated in the primary of 2022/2023 in the West District and Council Member Garvey, the Primary was May 9, 2023. If their proposal would have been in affect of the 50% plus one, there would not have been an August 8 election because Council Member McGarvey won decisively and could have been seated three months earlier and the nine months would have been six months. He stated there was also a Mayor Pro Tem during the nine months of the Lunde vacancy and with the Council Member Pha vacancy there was no one.

Commissioner Severin asked about the 5 dates to choose for the special elections. She stated on one special election, the call for the special election was on January 9 and asked why the primary was not in April because early voting would of started on February 23 because of the early voting/special election dates, the filing periods might of made a difference.

Chair Secara stated the Council was focused on the Council Member Pha's election and building its argument solely around that. He asked the Commissioners if the vacancy issue needed to be addressed.

Commissioner Hanson stated they were at a point that until the Commissioners educated the Council on the Charter and gave them the special election information, there was no point in figuring out a way forward because the Commissioners didn't know what the Council wanted because the Council didn't know what they wanted.

Commissioner Severin stated it would also be good to have some frame of an opinion from the

Commissioners once the chart was given to the Council because the Commissioners had time to review it and noticed some observations that would be helpful.

Commissioner Bor stated it was clear whatever the Commissioners moved forward with, the Council was looking at what they repeatedly said, a shorter time period to fill the vacancy. She stated with the time sequence they looked at in the special elections chart, should be brought to the Council's attention at what the Commission was looking at when they read the amendment.

Commissioner Williams stated they continued to go back to not knowing what the Council wanted and stated the Charter Commission was a discreet Commission, should go forward, make their own educated opinion, and not wait for guidance from the Council. He agreed with educating the Council about the Charter Commission.

Commissioner Hanson clarified the Council couldn't decide on what the Commissioners put in front of them until they understood the Commission's role, City Charter role, how elections worked and the timing. She stated it didn't do the Commissioners any good to give the Council what the Commission thought was their recommendation because they wouldn't understand it.

Commissioner Bor stated Council Liaison Klonowski missed two meetings where the Commission evolved on a consensus and one Commissioner opposed the amendment. She stated it was critical when they were operating under the request of the Council to have Council representation at the Commission meetings. She stated whether Council Member Klonowski asked someone else to attend, the Commission would have saved more time if that was the issue. She stated how important it was for the Council Liaison to attend and it might not be perceived as they were needed, but in that case it would have been helpful.

Commissioner Simmons stated that given the thorough research and their understanding of it, asked if the Commission would change their position on it or if they were to do it again, go forward with the same recommendation. He stated he was inclined to reject the initial recommendation and say nothing needed to be done at all, it was not a crisis and nothing that needed fixing.

He stated one thing that struck him in the minutes that was odd was the tabling of the resolution that killed it, it was not a reject, it was tabled. His understanding of Roberts Rules was a motion to take it off the table would be in order and was not dead unless the Council operated in a different way than what he was used to. He stated they could take it back, they didn't reject it, could pick up where they left off and reconsider it. He didn't know if the city attorney's view would have them start over with a first and second reading or take it off the table and start up again as they already had the recommendation. He stated if they were to do it again, he didn't think he would give it to the Council. He stated he would start over and say there was nothing that needed fixing. He stated if the Commissioners were to do it again and knowing what they knew asked if they would change their minds.

Commissioner Bor stated the city attorney recommended that it go back to the Commission because Council Member Lee wanted to amend the ordinance and approved that night.

Chair Secara stated Council Member Lee wanted to tweak the language according to what the Council wanted and pass it and the attorney said they couldn't do it.

Commissioner Simmons stated the Council didn't send anything to the Commission they tabled the motion, and nothing had been communicated to the Commission.

Commissioner Severin stated the Council was told they had no power to do that, and it was the Charter Commission's job to tweak it and give it to the Council.

Commissioner Simmons asked how they knew other than the minutes, that it was tabled.

Commissioner Bor stated that was the phrased that was used.

Staff Liaison Montero stated that was the phrase used and how it was relayed to the Council.

Commissioner Simmons stated that as a semi-autonomous body would help the Commission formally know what the Council did with it, rather than the informal method of reading the minutes. He stated nothing had been transmitted back to the Commission and might help in this situation. He stated he was seeing a resolution that was tabled and it meant the ordinance was not dead.

Commissioner Bor stated it was through the attorney and he corrected the Council member who wanted to do a process that was not allowable. She stated the ordinance needed to go back to the Charter Commission if they did not approve it at the second reading.

Chair Secara stated he thought what Commissioner Simmons was talking about was the Council should have sent it back to the Commission with red ink what they wanted changed, what they did not like, the reason for the rejection or short of that it was tabled. He stated that because the Commissioners didn't get written comments from them, then it stood as a tabled motion.

Commissioner Bor stated if they read the Council minutes, the Council would not approve the way the amendment was written other than the first aspect of it on the 50 plus one and that was all uniform. She stated it was the second aspect of the ordinance and the timeline they perceived it would take over a year. She stated there was no knowledge of the special election chart and what the reality was. She stated if they read the minutes, it would tell the Commissioners what was not acceptable to them.

Commissioner Simmons stated the amendment was not formally tabled and no motion made by the Council.

Commissioner Bor stated no motion was made and it evolved to how the Council wanted it to be redone by them and approved that night and that was when the attorney intervened.

Commissioner Hanson stated she was thinking about the underrepresentation and not having someone there. She stated the Council operated with Council members missing all the time. She stated Council Liaison Klonowski was not in attendance and the Commission had no one representing the Council. She stated she would rather have a seat sit open and was only one vote than to have an appointment process. She stated it could be a politically appointment or done for other reasons. She stated she would rather see the process take time because the Council held meetings all the time with Council members not attending. She didn't feel the length of the seat being open, because the Council wanted to fill the seat, was important enough to make all those changes.

Commissioner Alabi stated the chart appeared to be an outlier and asked what the protocol was to hand things back to the Commission. He stated the Commissioners couldn't assume that it was coming back to the Commission to look at it again. He asked what the formal handoff was to send it back to the Commission.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the Chair presented the item to the Council, was responsible for returning to the Commission and report on the presentation.

Commissioner Severin stated it might seem like an outlier but was a recent trend and thought that

was why they were getting concerned because there was the efficiency prior and all the sudden everything was taking so long. She stated they would feel empowered once they saw the chart, and pointed out, Lisa Jacobson, August 10, accepted resignation and took 28 days to declare the vacancy and shouldn't of happened. She stated many of the previous special elections, they declared a vacancy and called for a special election at the same meeting. She stated when they see the chart and the gaps for the Jacobson election, that was two months that didn't need to go by and the four-month gap went to a six month gap. She stated if they were concerned about the nine-month gap, the best way was to go back to the old way and not to have a special primary election.

Commissioner Bor stated the Council was new and didn't have the special elections chart the Commissioners were looking at tonight. She stated Commissioner Szach raised in earlier discussions the importance of the vacancy being an elected position in whatever the process was and she made it clear to the Council and they understood. She stated what they wanted to see in the interim was to appoint someone and didn't say it had to be from the same district until the time the election process occurred. She stated what the Commissioners recommended was not off but needed to be looked at to enhance the process and she asked if the Commissioners would allow the appointment to happen until the election occurred.

Commissioner Williams stated they needed to address it. The Council was concerned about it, the attorney said to send it back to the Commission and was an opportunity to improve the Charter. He stated the special elections chart pointed out areas of concern, could correct them and should go forward with it.

Commissioner Hanson asked what the process was if the Commission said no to the Council. She stated they could tell the Council they didn't see a problem with the vacancy and couldn't force the Commission to do the amendment.

Commissioner Williams thought the amendment could go back to the Council and if they had a unanimous agreement make changes to the City Charter.

Chair Secara stated they could do a ballot initiative too. He questioned the previous special elections without a special primary and asked if back then it was specified no primary in the Charter or because there were only two candidates.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the resolutions referenced 2.06(B) and would have to do more research on it regarding not having the special primary elections.

Commissioner Williams asked if they were bound by state law to have a 46 day early voting period for special elections.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the city followed state law and the city Charter also said to follow state election law related to elections. He stated the early voting period was changed from 30 days to 46 days in 2010.

Commissioner Alabi stated the special election dates were mandated by the state.

Commissioner Hanson suggested a motion on the next steps given the information received from the staff liaison to table the Commission's discussion of tonight's topic until the Commission had a chance to have a work session with the Council. She didn't think it was necessary for all the Commissioners to attend but the Chair and city attorney needed to be there to explain the election process, the dates, why the timings were what they were and go through the special elections chart so they had a better understanding. She stated the Commissioners could use the notes from

that work session at the next meeting when they discussed it so the Commissioners could at least know what the Council understood.

Commissioner Williams thought the Commissioners should look at the amendment and give their recommendations to the Council and asked the reason for waiting on the amendment.

Commissioner Hanson stated waiting was important because if the Council was educated and understood what the Commission's recommendation was in the first place, they might say to move forward, not table it and vote on it.

Commissioner Bor stated it was not the education to the amendment the Commission sent, it was education on the flow around the Charter to the city in what they represented. She stated Brooklyn Park was a Charter city and asked how the Council members were oriented when they became a Council member. She stated they should give them the global education, the autonomy of the commission, how the Commissioners were appointed and independence that was discussed earlier.

Motion Commissioner Hanson, that we table our discussion around the Charter amendment Section 4.03 until a work session has taken place with the city Council with members of the Charter Commission and topics to be covered: the Charter, how we are a city Charter, and all of its functions, how we are appointed, education around the laws we we are governed, holding elections, and the timing of the elections.

Commissioner Severin suggested using Attachment 5.1E because it would be the most important piece to the Council along with the Charter definition.

Chair Secara stated he didn't know they could be educated on the special elections chart until they were educated on the city Charter and election laws.

He stated the motion on the table was to table discussion on Section 4.03 and suggested it as a separate motion. He asked for a second on the motion.

Commissioner Alabi seconded the motion to table discussion on Section 4.03.

Commissioner Williams stated the Commissioners were usually out for the summer and likely won't get decided until next fall.

The vote on the motion passed. Commissioner Williams voted no.

Chair Secara asked about the second motion.

Motion Commissioner Bor, seconded by Commissioner Hanson, if accepted to the Council work session that Charter representation occur for the basis of the Charter in the flow that occurs with an amendment.

She stated if they were given 10 minutes they could reference the most recent amendment process they did not like, how that flowed and what the city attorney recommended.

Commissioner Bor stated at the second reading of the ordinance, the interpretation was that a Council member adjust the amendment as it read, and they could also vote on it that night and more than one Council member concurred to that.

Chair Secara stated they could send a copy of the city Charter to the Council and tell their roles,

power, duties and responsibilities were defined in the city Charter.

Commissioner Bor suggested giving them an index so they could reference something in the Charter if they needed to, would be an advantage.

Commissioner Alabi suggested something on the communication flow from the Charter Commission to the Council and back to the Charter Commission.

Chair Secara stated there was a motion for the Charter Commission to be included in a Council work session to discuss basic Charter education and asked if there was a second to the motion.

Commissioner Hanson seconded the motion.

Commissioner Severin stated the Special Elections chart should be included as it was eye opening to the Commissioners to see how the special elections were held. She stated it would give context about not ignoring the Council on the amendment because that was what they were concerned about. She stated it would make sense to them, and what spurred it on was what they wanted the Commissioners to do with the length of the gaps with the vacancies.

The vote on the motion carried unanimously.

5.2 Commission Orientation

Commissioner Bor reported on the new Commissioners orientation. She stated the Mayor delivered an informative and empowering talk as he came from the state legislature and talked about acquiring funding for Brooklyn Park projects and was a disadvantage to Commissioners not to have that knowledge. She stated many of the Commission tables were full with Commissioners and not all were new Commissioners. She stated the Charter Commission table would have been empty had she not shown up and thought it was a disservice when they were trying to educate others on who they were and represented. She stated it was valuable and the city manager and staff liaison also presented. She recommended in the future the Charter Commission have representation at the orientation and didn't have to be a new Commissioner to attend.

Commissioner Williams asked if that orientation was used to bring in potential applicants for Commissions.

Staff Liaison Montero stated applicants were also encouraged to attend Commission meetings to learn more about the Commissions.

Chair Secara stated that as a Commission they were not as visible to the community as the Planning Commission, Budget Advisory Commission, and other Commissions. He stated the Commission operated independently on its own and did not have a lot of visibility.

Commissioner Bor stated it was informative as three city officials had been at the legislature that day and were very current on what was being discussed on the funding for desired projects.

6. New Business

6.1 Charter Commission at Council Work Session

Chair Secara stated they would include Attachment 5.1E and a copy of the entire city Charter.

7. Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committee

Commissioner Hanson wanted to discuss what they could do on communication to the Council if the Council Liaison couldn't attend the Charter Commission to send someone else.

Staff Liaison Montero stated they could send that communication to the Council and go through the city manager.

Commissioner Alabi asked how many meetings the Council liaison had missed. He stated it seemed like it was a public flogging.

Commissioner Hanson stated it was not just for the Charter Commission but would apply to all Commissions. If a Council member couldn't attend their meeting, they would try their best to find someone to attend in their place. She stated the business the Commission did was important. She stated if items continued to go to the Council and a Council liaison wasn't present when it was discussed, then the Commission didn't have support for educating the rest of the Council as to what those Commission discussions were. She stated a Council member couldn't get the tone and context from reading the minutes. She stated the Council members could verbally give a brief summary at their Council meetings.

Commissioner Alabi suggested approaching it that way and felt it was like public flogging if communication was sent to the Council regarding attendance. He stated they could tell the Council Liaison if they couldn't attend because the Commission might be discussing things they might need to present to the Council to make an effort to send someone else.

Commissioner Hanson asked Chair Secara if he would be willing to reach out to Council Liaison Klonowski.

Staff Liaison Montero suggested working through the city manager related to communicating to the Council liaison.

Commissioner Williams stated he had been on other Commissions and didn't see that issue where the Council Liaisons were absent that much. He asked if that was a trend and if the Charter Commission Council liaison was the only one being absent or happening at all of the Commissions.

Commissioner Simmons stated the mayor got a report of Council Liaison attendance to Commissions. He stated the mayor would know which Council members did or did not attend Commission meetings. He stated it was one of their responsibilities and couldn't make a Council member do anything.

Commission Hanson stated a better approach would be to state the Commission was there to help the city government run efficiently and helping the Council. She thought a discussion amongst the Council or city manager would help and the Commissions value the Council's input or attendance so they could learn, hear, and deliver those messages from the Commission. She stated when they all worked together things worked better.

Chair Secara stated he would go to Attachment 5.1E, if Council Liaison Klonowski was in attendance a lot of the things would have been cleared up and not tabled and she requested the information on the vacancy gaps.

He stated he would reach out to the city manager and ask in the event Council Member Klonowski was not able to attend a regular scheduled Commission meeting, that another Council member attend in her place and report back to the Council accordingly.

Staff Liaison Montero stated at the beginning of each year the mayor appointed Council liaisons and suggested a primary and alternate Council Liaison be appointed.

8. Correspondence/Communications

Commissioner Williams stated his term ended on May 31 and would attend the May 8 meeting. He stated he was honored to serve on the Commission. He stated the Commission had addressed some important issues and the city Charter was the constitution of the city. He stated the Commission made the Charter better, making sure the Charter was followed, current and readable. He stated it was time for him to move on and was involved in other things on a state and national level and wanted to devote more time to it. He stated it was time for other people to step in and lend their voices for the city. He stated he had seen a lot of changes in the city and a wonderful place to live. He stated he had seen the change from a farm agriculturally controlled to a diverse city and was a example for the country on how future communities should thrive.

Commissioners Simmons stated he appreciated the appointment to the BP 2025 Steering Committee. He stated the Commission would get an update from those meetings.

9. Adjournment

Motion Chair Secara, second by Commissioner Hanson to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Devin Montero,
Staff Liaison