

Brooklyn Park Charter Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Present: Chair Dennis Secara, Commissioners Sunday Alabi, Barbara Bor, Shamara Freeman Amy Hanson, Peggy Larkin, Gregory Szach; Paula Weakly, Sheldon Willaims; Council Liaison Nichole Klonowski and Staff Liaison Devin Montero

Absent: Susan Mabera (excused), LaDawn Severin (excused)

1.1 Welcome New Commissioners

Chair Secara and Commissioners welcomed new Commissioners Paula Weakly and Sheldon Williams.

2. Public Comment – None.

3. Additions/Approval of the Agenda of April 9, 2025

Motion Commissioner Larkin, Second Commissioner Hanson to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 FEBRUARY 12, 2025, MEETING

Motion Commissioner Hason, Second Commissioner Bor to approve February 12, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed. Chair Secara abstained.

5. Old Business

6. Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees

7. New Business

7.1 Mayor/Council Salaries

Chair Secara stated the salaries issue was brought before the Charter Commission a few years ago because the Commission was the only Commission whose members were not appointed by the Council. He stated the Council felt that the Charter Commission's independence was a valuable asset in that area and wanted the Commission to look at the mayor and Council salaries and determine if they should or should not be increased. He stated the Commissioners had an attachment of Mayor/Council salary comparisons for 2025. He stated it had a list of cities in similar size in the metro area.

He stated Bloomington was 98,298, the closest to Brooklyn Park in population. He stated the salary for the mayor was \$26,400 and Council members was \$12,396 and Brooklyn Park was \$11,856 for Council members and the mayor's was \$17,796.

Commissioner Larkin stated she saw in the 2024 budget that City Manager Stroebel got a 3% increase and wanted to know if he got something different this year.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the city manager got an increase after his performance evaluation

and was not sure of the amount.

Commissioner Weakly asked what the regular employees got for raises this year. She stated normally there was a targeted amount.

Staff Liaison Montero stated the regular employees got a 3% increase.

Council Member Klonowski asked if that was regarding the big study being done on staff compensation.

Staff Liaison Montero stated Council Liaison Klonowski was referring to the compensation study the city recently did and resulted in some employees getting an increase in their wages in addition to the 3%.

Commissioner Williams asked about the increase in salary and what was the cost for the city.

Chair Secara clarified what was the basis for the 3%.

Staff Liaison Montero stated he couldn't recall but would get that information.

Chair Secara stated he would guess it was the adjustment for inflation.

Commissioner Weakly stated it was normally some type of HR survey that a company would do with other businesses of similar size. She stated a city didn't want to be the highest payer in the market or the lowest. She stated there was normally some sort of range that was around the median and the average.

Commissioner Bor stated what was before the Commission now was discussing the Council and was a different role in addition to the work they did. She stated the city manager's memo that was on the table was part of the discussion the Commission should center on.

Commissioner Alabi stated he looked at the chart and the one he believed was comparative to Brooklyn Park was Bloomington and could look at it as a guide.

Commissioner Larkin stated she would agree in population, but in the budget, Plymouth was closer. She stated the city didn't have the same budget as Bloomington and thought that was important. She stated there was a \$69 million difference between Brooklyn Park and Bloomington and \$22 million between Plymouth. She stated previously the mayor got an increase and not the Council members. She thought it was important to make sure the Council was addressed.

Commissioner Weakly stated she was working on the numbers and took out the full-time mayor numbers and there were 15 cities and the average mayor compensation was \$18,110.73 which was 2% less than the average of the 15 cities. She stated the Council members were at 5% less than the average and maybe because it wasn't raised before.

Commissioner Bor stated she would like to see those figures. She stated they calculated it in their previous discussions as they looked at where they fit it in the city with the Mayor and Council Members.

Commissioner Alabi stated he didn't know how comfortable the Council liaison was in attendance while they discussed the mayor/Council member salaries.

Chair Secara stated that the Council Liaison was not a voting member of the Commission.

Commissioner Alabi stated the Commissioners were discussing whether to give them an increase or not and whichever direction they went, the Council Liaison would be impacted by it.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated she hoped that she could answer questions the Commissioners had. She stated the meeting minutes were public records and could see them one way or the other. She stated they all took actions, the Commission and others that affected the city broadly. She stated it was a statutory responsibility and was something that was done every other year. She stated it got reviewed and was in favor or reviewing it especially after working with former Mayor Lisa Jacobson trying to run a small business and seeing the amount of time she put in that the current Mayor Winston did. She stated when they realized the amount of work Council Members, especially the mayor's position, put in and the low pay, she thought about who would want to run for mayor next. She stated it might be detrimental to people wanting to be mayor and wasn't a part time job. She stated it took so much time out of their lives.

Commissioner Larkin stated it was a public meeting and Council member Klonowski was in attendance and to say what the Commissioners thought and move forward because they were going to know about it anyway.

She stated they did a lot more hours than just Council meetings that they were aware of. She stated if they got the \$50 for every activity they went to, they could put in for that. She thought an increase would be necessary but wanted to point it out.

Commissioner Bor stated since they received the memo from the City Manager and thought the Commissioners should review the memo because many of the Commissioners had not participated in their previous discussions.

Chair Secara stated there was also a memo from Commissioner Severin. He read the memo from Commissioner Severin.

Commissioner Bor read the memo from City Manager Stroebel.

Commissioner Alabi stated he was inclined to ask for the increase and asked what the logistics would be to get to that. He stated they knew they had two bookends, Plymouth and Bloomington, and asked if they were looking at it from a budget perspective and also looking at the population. He stated he looked at Plymouth and their budget was less than the city's budget and their mayor made a lot more. The population was 86,000 and Bloomington was 89,086. He stated he understood the budgets, but the commitment didn't become less if there was more budgets and thought they needed to discuss what was reasonable.

Commissioner Larkin asked if the Plymouth or Bloomington had the \$50 per day supplemental compensation. She stated the mayor would get \$50 every time he attended an event. If he attended two a week, that was 50 times a year, which was \$5,200 a year which brought him up to \$22,009.96. She asked if the other cities had something similar.

Staff Liaison Montero stated he would check with the other cities if they had something similar. He stated the Council Member also had to apply for that compensation and a lot did not ask for that compensation.

Commissioner Larkin stated that the difference of population was not related but \$69 million versus \$22 million had to do what they could afford.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated the Council rarely took compensation and thought it was for out of town and overnight. She asked about the \$50 when the mayor did the state of the city, could the mayor apply for that \$50 compensation.

Staff Liaison Montero stated that whenever the Council Members went to a conference, they would be submitting an expense report, which meant submitting receipts, and getting per diem in addition to the \$50 compensation.

Council Liaison Klonowski asked if she went to the Cop and Teens basketball event, could she apply for the \$50 compensation.

Staff Liaison Montero stated he believed the \$50 compensation was for out of town events.

Commissioner Hanson stated with the mayor annual base salary, in order to bring it close to the \$21,001.48 in Plymouth, a 20% increase is an increase of \$3,559 which then brings it to \$21,355. She stated when she thought about a percentage and heard it was a 20% increase to get to that number, it made her uncomfortable.

Commissioner Weakly stated in fairness to the employees where the budget was 3% for an annual increase, she would have a hard time and sure there were exceptional employees that went up to 4 or 5. She stated she was fine with 5% for the Council Members but believed for the mayor 5% would be as high as she would want to go.

Chair Secara stated there was a consensus that a compensation increase for the mayor and Council should be in line with that of city staff which was noted as around 3% and not giving anything more than that would be problematic. He stated that was a great increase than what staff got and staff was full time, where the mayor and Council members were part time.

He pointed out the per diem and benefits, imagined the mayor and Council Members had employment outside and had health insurance and benefits through their employers. If they retired, they probably had social security, and the benefits compensation took care of themselves in that respect. He stated on the per diem, it was up to the Council Members to claim it and it was managed for out-of-city expenses.

Commissioner Bor stated they discussed it under the auspices of the salaries for the compensation and was a small number and not a huge contributor to their salary.

Commissioner Larkin stated it didn't say it had to be out of town. She stated it said that it was an approved activity which could be testifying at the legislature.

Staff Liaison Montero stated he would follow up on it and verify what it meant.

Commissioner Larkin stated there was a way to increase, because there could be someone who had more time and could go do more of that. She stated they also could have a mayor who did not have the time and couldn't go and do those things. She stated there was some room to the increase based on the input in different events. She noted on the comparison chart where there was a \$25 per committee meeting or inter agency assignments and some of the cities had some

of that and if they were not using it they could.

Commissioner Alabi stated they had to be careful that if they were using that, potentially, they could make money off it when someone went out of town and presents a receipt. He stated there was no money for them to make and they were getting compensated for expenses that they incurred while they were out of town. He asked about travel expenses, and was not part of his compensation, and was not doing it to make money. He stated if they were doing something on behalf of the city, they had to be careful and start thinking, they had another way to make money. If that was the way for them to make money, then they didn't belong as the Council or mayor. He stated they had looked at that figure before, how many of those were compensated and was a miniscule amount.

He stated if the staff liaison could show for the last year two years, how much that had been claimed. He stated, they should not use that only to have another way of making it up. He stated it was for doing something for the city and whatever expense they incurred while they were doing that was being covered. He stated it was not an avenue to supplement their salary.

Commissioner Bor stated a previous Council member who was no longer on the Council, came last year and requested that type of compensation for going out of town. She stated the individual requested it based on collaboration with a public organization. She stated it would contribute to their knowledge base and was not directly related to the city. She stated the city denied that request. She stated it was not just carte blanche when going out of town and representing the city. She stated it was a small figure and would rather discuss first what they were doing with their salaries, then look at the further compensation and then decide.

Commissioner Larkin clarified the Council deserved to be compensated for their time and was okay with them being compensated for their time.

Staff Liaison Montero suggested narrowing it down to a few cities they wanted to make comparisons to and he would do more research as far as additional compensation for the Council Members and mayor.

Chair Secara thought there was a consensus they needed to remain within reasonable parameters for budget purposes and concerning themselves with the base salaries as listed in the comparison data chart. He stated there was discomfort going 3% as an increase and sounded like they needed to do more research into what exactly comprised the base salary in other cities for comparisons and make a compensation decision based on that.

Commissioner Bor clarified if they were in agreement at an increase for both the mayor and Council members, and what cities they wanted to compare to.

Chair Secara stated Bloomington would be one.

Commissioner Larkin proposed Plymouth and Lakeville as their budgets were close to Brooklyn Park.

Chair Secara confirmed with the Commissioners they would review Bloomington, Plymouth and Lakeville.

Council Member Klonowski stated that not every city met as a Council every Monday. She stated some cities met twice a month and didn't have the number of activities and that might be

a consideration to look into by the staff liaison.

Commissioner Larkin stated they should also look at how many Commissions each city had, because Brooklyn Par's participation was going to end up being a lot more than the other cities.

Chair Secara stated they wanted a compensation level commensurate with the responsibility level. He stated that was what they were trying to get to by looking at responsibilities of the mayor and Council in those three cities mentioned to make the appropriate determination.

Commissioner Weakly stated she was not sure looking at cities was necessarily the way to go because the duties could be different. She stated the city did have an outside consultant look at the salaries for the city employees. She asked if it was possible to engage that consultant to look at the salaries of the Council members and mayor.

Chair Secara stated that it would be an expense and the Charter Commission was given the responsibility for it.

Commissioner Weakly stated she would not be comfortable with more than 3% to 5% for the mayor and 5% for the Council.

Commissioner Alabi asked if they were tabling the discussion and if they needed a motion listing what they wanted the staff liaison to research based on those three cities. Bloomington, Plymouth and Lakeville.

Motion Commissioner Alabi, Seconded by Commissioner Bor to table.

Chair Secara stated the motion was to table the discussion on the Mayor and Council salaries until the May meeting and receive the requested information from the three cities, Bloomington, Plymouth and Lakeville.

Staff Liaison Montero confirmed of frequency of meetings, additional compensation and how many times they filed for expenses.

The motion passed unanimously.

7.2 April 7 Council Work Session – Charter Commission Presentation

Chair Secara briefed the Commissioners on their presentation to the Council at the April 7 work session. He stated he presented with Vice Chair Bor on everything the Charter Commission had done up to last October on Section 2.06 and Section 4.03. He thanked the Commissioners who were able to attend the work session. He gave an overview beginning with the request by the Council on looking into the issue of shortening the Council vacancies and the costs of special elections. He also briefed on the previous special elections and vacancy gaps, options discussed, including appointments and the proposed amendments. He also reviewed the costs of the 2021 and 2023 special elections.

Commissioner Hanson stated when the Commissioners talked about that previously, they looked at the costs compared to the city budget and realized it was a small part of the city budget and was the price of democracy. She stated the Commissioners came to a consensus that the larger problem was the length of the time the seat remained open and not the costs of the special elections.

Chair Secara stated the mayor pointed out that it could delay city business because there were certain items that required unanimous consent and meant that all Council Members had to vote affirmatively or vote one way or the other affirmatively for something to pass within the budget. He stated depending on the time and length of vacancies, certain important business items could be delayed.

Commissioner Hanson stated the dates for the special primaries were not something the Commissioners got to choose. She stated those were preselected and couldn't choose to select a date to have a special primary date. She stated they were uniform election dates set by the state and could only hold special elections on those dates.

Chair Secara stated that was the basis for the amendment to Section 2.06, if the Council declared a vacancy and called for a special election on the same day, instead of the 45 days a part, they could get an earlier date. He stated if their proposal of the 50% plus one had been in effect on May 9, 2020, Tony McGarvey had 69% of the vote, more than enough to clear the threshold.

He stated under their proposed amendment, Tony McGarvey would have filled the vacancy that day and would not need a special election, saving costs for the special election, and not being a delay if any in city business. He stated the Council saw that and what the Commissioners were aiming at. He stated based on the consensus of the Council they liked what they saw, it put things on clear and very concrete terms for them. He stated the Council was willing to give it another try.

He presented the special election uniform dates for 2025 and stated if a special election was to be held and the unexpired term was two years, those were the dates the special election could be held as determined by the state legislature.

He stated that prior to 2014, the Charter said there wasn't a special primary regardless of the number of candidates and that same year the section of the Charter was amended to have a special primary election. He stated it was amended due to the Mayor Lampi special election that occurred and there were 12 candidates. He stated the candidate wouldn't have gotten close to the 50% and not have a plurality.

Commissioner Hanson asked if a motion was needed to send the amendments back to the Council.

Chair Secara stated a motion should be made to send the amendments back to the Council.

Motion Commissioner Hanson, seconded by Commissioner Alabi to resubmit the ordinance amendments regarding special elections as proposed in Sections 2.06 and 4.03 of the city Charter.

Council Member Klonowski stated the ordinance would need unanimous consent by the Council.

Staff Liaison Montero stated at the second reading, the ordinance would need a unanimous vote by all of the Council. At the public hearing and first reading of the ordinance, the Commissioners would get an idea from the Council which way the amendments were going to go.

Commissioner Bor stated they did not receive any questions or suggestions from the Council at the work session.

Commissioner Larkin stated she planned to have a personal conversation with a Council member to clarify anything.

Chair Secara stated the motion was to resubmit their proposal to amend Sections 2.06 and 4.03 without any further changes.

The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Liaison Montero briefed the Council on the timeline for the amendments to the Charter. He stated the Council would set the public hearing at the April 28 Council meeting. The public hearing and first reading of the ordinance would be held on May 26, on June 9, the second reading would be held and would become effective if approved on September 16.

Chair Secara stated at the May meeting, they would vote on whether or not to take the summer off and looked like they would not meet in July and August.

8. Correspondence/Communications

8.1 Council Liaison Update on Council Actions

Council Liaison Klonowski asked about Attachment 7.1B. She stated in February 2022, the Charter Commission approved a raise to the Mayor's salary at \$21,000 and looked like it went through a lot of steps and asked what happened to it and if it was recommended. She stated there was a second reading on Consent, a letter from the city manager. She stated Chair Secara presented it and the Commission said the mayor's compensation should be commensurate with the Mayor of Bloomington at \$26,000, and voted to raise the mayor specifically and not the Council. She stated the Mayor was at \$21,355 and asked what happened. She stated the staff report said it needed to be approved prior to the next municipal election which was scheduled November 8, and the staff report was from October 24 and asked if it passed.

She stated the Commissioners were talking about giving the mayor \$40 month because it was 3% and already said it was \$21,000

Staff Liaison Montero stated the ordinance did pass and would check into it.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated then it should have been at \$21,000, and that issue was moot and then there was back compensation.

Commissioner Alabi asked if there was a way to verify, they received the compensation change.

Chair Secara stated the Staff Liaison was going to check into it.

Council Liaison Klonowski briefed on their recent Work Session. She stated they had the Highway 252 update, and it was a long process. She stated Highway 252 was identified as having two of the highest traffic accidents and fatalities in the state. She stated at the presentation, Highway 252 was looking to go over the existing intersections. She stated there was still a cost to the city and didn't know how much and had gone through many layers of approvals needed. She stated it was still working its way through, and Brooklyn Center was not

in favor of any of the changes.

She stated Brooklyn Park was predominantly in favor and the city had high fatalities once a year, which was high. She stated with the proposals; it would be reduced significantly and more to come as time went by.

Commissioner Bor stated it was 8.7 miles in total and thought a larger percentage of that fell within Brooklyn Center. She stated the number of properties affected was one of the discussion points.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated Highway 94, the stretch of Highway 94 from downtown Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park had less traffic collisions than Highway 252. She stated if Brooklyn Center didn't approve the construction, it might happen mostly in Brooklyn Park and more information to come.

She stated the other area of discussion was the fire station update where the costs for everything were increasing rapidly. She stated the fire station the Council approved last year and kept it at what they had approved had now gone up to \$3 million. She stated they were continuing to assess the cost of it. She stated there were a lot of parking issues with where the fire station would be and it impacted the Community Activity Center and the future senior center.

She stated another discussion item was the PFAS issue, where the state was still trying to figure out the PFAS levels that were allowable. She stated the Council was going to have a work session on it and believed it was next week. She stated it could be a significant cost to the city and if the city had some wells out of compliance, the filtration system could cost \$80 million. She stated they were unsure of what level of grants would be coming from the state or federal government.

She stated it had put a huge wrinkle in some of their plans to address hardwater because that was a \$40 million investment. She stated it would be required by law and didn't have a choice but not do it. She stated there was more to come on that too and getting the carcinogens out of the water was important.

She stated they discussed the level three sex offender issue, and not many were aware the city didn't have rules surrounding the residency limitation for level three sex offenders, which were designated as the most likely to reoffend. She stated that was the topic of conversation where the city could put an ordinance in place. She stated the city had limits on how close a tobacco business could be to a school or daycare and should be doing that for the level three sex offenders. She stated that would be coming before the Council.

She stated the Council was working on an alternate Council liaison and the Charter Commission would have a Council liaison regularly if she couldn't be in attendance because she couldn't make the May meeting and would have someone in place to attend.

Chair Secara stated he had a question about the aquatic center. He stated the voters did approve the aquatics center and asked if there was any progress on that.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated the aquatic center was before her time. She stated it was \$40 million endeavor and unlikely to be funded.

Chair Secara stated that it was approved by the voters and that language was in the bill in 2018.

He asked how that could be abrogated and would it have to be voted on. He stated he understood the costs had ballooned and the initial money allocated was nowhere near adequate for it.

He asked if they needed to submit a new bonding bill to the voters, minus the aquatic center or with a realistic cost projection. He stated it sounded like a state audit issue and people voted on it and it was not getting done. He asked where that money was and what it was being used for.

Council Liaison Klonowski thought it was reallocated and put into parks and recreation.

Staff Liaison Montero stated prior to COVID, the city was getting close to having a partnership with the YMCA and then COVID hit and fell apart after that.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated the YMCA changed their business model and stopped participating in aquatic centers and sold a lot of their properties because of declining municipal code. She stated that on what happened to the bonding money and whatever amount it was, that would need to be a compliance check.

Commissioner Alabi stated he would also be interested in finding out because families voted for it and to even reallocate the funds, asked if it was legal.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated she didn't know about that in particular because it was before her time, but some of the bonding bills they had passed and things the voters approved or even bonding dollars, they had been allocated for certain projects.

She stated when they weren't feasible or they needed to change, they went back to the legislators and amended the language. She stated she didn't know if that happened but, was a possibility that the language could have been changed and the money put into something else.

Staff Liaison Montero stated he would check into it.

Chair Secara went back to the special elections. He stated when there was a special election, the city had to budget for the primary and general election and didn't know if they would be dealing with one or two. He stated if the candidate at the primary had gotten 50.1%, the city Council had the authority to reallocate that money for public purposes via the public purpose expenditure policy.

He stated that it wasn't the explicit purpose for that change in the public purpose expenditure policy, but it could be to reallocate the \$17,000 to that. He stated that was an advantage to their proposal and could be reallocated and didn't know if that same principle applied to the bonding measures.

Commissioner Bor stated the city was focused on the opportunity to develop the last corridor to a biotech bulk of business. She stated in order to have it go forward, there had to be infrastructure which included water. She stated even though there would be mitigation, that it was going to require within the city, for PFAS, but also the hardness of the water. She stated that a water system to serve the biotech industry would have to be state of the art and would be extremely expensive.

Council Liaison Klonowski stated that some of the water infrastructure bonding was from the legislature now. She stated they approved and gave the city the designation for Biotech

Innovation District. She stated the mayor, City Manager Stroebel, Community Development Director Gladhill and others had spent a lot of time at the legislature constantly asking for money for the community activity center or water infrastructure among other things to help support the world.

9. Adjournment

Motion Chair Secara, second by Commissioner Alabi to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Devin Montero
Staff Liaison