



CITY OF COCONUT CREEK CITY COMMISSION WORKSHOP MINUTES

Government Center
4800 W. Copans Road
Coconut Creek, Florida

Date: September 13, 2023
Time: 5:00 p.m.
Meeting No. 2023-0913WS

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Rydell called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

PRESENT UPON ROLL CALL:

Mayor Joshua Rydell
Vice Mayor Sandra L. Welch
Commissioner Jacqueline Railey
Commissioner John A. Brodie
Commissioner Jeffrey R. Wasserman
City Manager Karen M. Brooks
City Attorney Terrill C. Pyburn
City Clerk Joseph J. Kavanagh

ALSO PRESENT:

Assistant City Attorney Eve M. Lewis

DISCUSSION – CHARTER AMENDMENTS TO PROVIDE FOR ELECTED MAYOR AND CHANGE OF MUNICIPAL ELECTION DATE FROM MARCH TO NOVEMBER

Mayor Rydell confirmed that everyone had met individually with City Attorney Pyburn to discuss the potential amendments. He suggested a poll of the Commission on the two (2) individual issues of placing a referendum on the ballot, asking residents if they supported moving to an elected mayor and moving municipal elections from March to November. Mayor Rydell polled the Commission as follows:

- Commissioner Wasserman stated he supported placing the mayor on the ballot and did not support the question regarding the election date.
- Commissioner Brodie was in support of both items being determined by the voters.
- Commissioner Railey stated she supported an appointed mayor and was undecided on the election date change.
- Vice Mayor Welch stated her primary objective was to move the election date in response to requests from the voters. She noted she had not heard feedback from voters regarding an elected mayor.
- Mayor Rydell stated that the voters should be able to decide both issues.

City Attorney Pyburn stated that as there was a majority in favor of a discussion and potential referendum, staff would proceed with a presentation. She explained sample language was provided in the backup materials for each scenario.

Assistant City Attorney Eve M. Lewis outlined options for potential ballot language. She noted that Options A and B were for individual ballot questions, and Options C and D provided for language for both issues with alternate timelines for implementation. She discussed the data gathered on the election process in

other municipalities. City Attorney Pyburn provided additional detail as needed. She clarified that the options for a one-time shorter or longer term would apply to a future election, as the current terms could not be modified.

Commissioner Wasserman asserted that while he understood these were hot topics that had come up during the last election cycle, putting both items on the ballot at the same time would be a lot for voters, especially at the same time as a presidential election. He noted he was opposed to a strong mayor, but because they were only discussing a ceremonial mayor, giving the people the choice was appropriate.

Commissioner Brodie stated that having an elected mayor brings stability to a city. He explained he was not as sure about moving the election date but believed the voters should have the opportunity to voice their opinion and make the decision. He suggested the Commission also consider the idea of moving the Commission seats to at large seats.

Commissioner Railey stated she was all for the people having a voice, and asserted they do have a voice when they elect each Commissioner. She noted her concern was that any one (1) district could have the power of the election by having a seated mayor for four (4) years. She stated electing a mayor at large, potentially without any experience on the Commission, could be an unsettling situation. Continuing, Commissioner Railey noted that she was torn on whether to change the date of the municipal election. She commented that a municipal election in November could get lost in the weeds and added that any change to the election date was going to have convoluted results.

Vice Mayor Welch responded to Commissioner Brodie's comment regarding opening up the districts to make them all at large, noting Plantation had four (4) Council members who lived in or near the same neighborhood, and that scenario could happen in Coconut Creek, as well. Continuing, Vice Mayor Welch stated that based on the feedback she had received in the community, voters were interested in changing the election to November, and it was the time to put the issue on the ballot for the voters to decide. She noted that she did not feel the need to put the mayor on the ballot; but if that was the preference of the Commission, Option D would be more equitable.

Mayor Rydell stated it was striking that only three (3) of the thirty-one (31) cities surveyed did not have an elected mayor. He asserted that in a more modern society, residents were not benefiting from not being able to choose their own mayor. He acknowledged that in a City Manager/Commission form of government there was a component of the title being ceremonial and shared an anecdote to illustrate the disconnect between the title and the current position in the minds of community members. He stated he had reached out to elected officials in two (2) cities that changed from rotating mayors in the past decade, which conversations bolstered his position. Mayor Rydell discussed recent election trends and discussed historical difficulty campaigning in the Wynmoor neighborhood. He stated he might support moving away from having districts, but not at this time.

Vice Mayor Welch commented that Broward County had a rotational mayor, providing for diversity in backgrounds and initiatives, which added to the flavor of the entire Commission. She noted all nine (9) County Commissioners had a chance to fully share with the County, not just the district for which they were voted, as mayor for a year. She stated Coconut Creek stood out in this way, as well, and noted the way past mayors had brought their own flavor to the City.

Mayor Rydell highlighted the politics within the Commission that determined who served as mayor. He stated he agreed that there was a different dynamic brought by each person, but because it was not a true rotation, not everyone would have an opportunity to serve in the role. Mayor Rydell commented on the options presented by staff, and noted he was not a fan of extending any terms, as that was not the will of the voters. Vice Mayor Welch asserted that shortening the terms also was not the will of the people. Discussion continued.

Commissioner Wasserman noted the potential for tensions and impact on relationships associated with the current process for selecting a mayor and stated this was in part what led him to support placing the issue on the ballot. He asked if electing a mayor every two (2) years had been considered. Assistant City Attorney Lewis stated that staff had looked at all of the possibilities. She noted that as a model, Margate had done a staggered, two (2) year term beginning in 2028. She explained the factors that had gone into selecting the individual scenarios presented as Options A through D and the considerations of existing terms which had led to staff not presenting a two (2) year option. Commissioner Wasserman pointed out that the neighboring municipalities have two (2) year mayoral terms. Assistant City Attorney Lewis confirmed that Margate, Coral Springs, and Wilton Manors all appeared to have two (2) year terms. She noted that in reviewing the research, it was clear every city's process was different, but elongated terms did seem to be the acceptable norm in creating the change sought. Commissioner Wasserman expressed concern that going to a two (2) year mayoral election might lead to the Commission candidates being disenfranchised by the attention placed on the mayoral race. City Attorney Pyburn highlighted potential conflicts created by a two (2) year mayoral term, including unnecessary vacancies created by Commissioners resigning to run for mayor. Discussion continued.

Commissioner Wasserman stated that he did not want to rush the process. Mayor Rydell noted that the intent of the workshop was to provide direction to staff as to what should be brought to a Commission meeting for public input. City Attorney Pyburn explained that the earliest available election date to move ballot questions forward was November 2024. She outlined the timeline and steps required to place an item on the ballot. Mayor Rydell noted there would be a resign-to-run issue if any member of the current Commission wanted to run for the position of mayor. City Attorney Pyburn provided additional detail.

Commissioner Railey stated it did not matter if there was tension or discourse among the Commissioners; the Commission always did what was best for the City. She highlighted potential issues with the change to a mayoral election and stated they should think long and hard before making a decision. She asked for clarification on the number of cities in Broward County that did not directly elect their mayor. Discussion ensued briefly.

City Manager Brooks explained that, under the Charter, the mayor position must be appointed. She suggested the Commission could also consider a Charter amendment which states the mayor position shall be rotated. Mayor Rydell thanked City Manager Brooks for her input and stated he did not support that option.

Assistant City Attorney Lewis provided additional clarification on systems in place in other cities.

City Attorney Pyburn sought consensus as to whether staff should move forward with changing the municipal election from March to November.

Commissioner Railey asked what the next steps would be if the change was not made now. Assistant City Attorney Lewis advised that a Charter Review Board was scheduled to convene in January 2025, and this conversation could be revisited at that time.

Consensus to pursue the change to November municipal elections failed, with Commissioner Wasserman, Commissioner Brodie, and Commissioner Railey opposed.

Mayor Rydell sought consensus as to whether staff should move forward with a ballot question regarding an elected mayor.

Commissioner Wasserman stated he would like to further workshop the issue. Discussion ensued regarding the time needed to schedule a ballot question on the next General Election.

Consensus was to direct staff to bring additional options forward regarding the elected mayor position. Commissioner Railey and Vice Mayor Welch were opposed.

Mayor Rydell asserted it was important that the matter of the November elections be brought before the Charter Review Board. He noted that a ballot initiative would also be an option for the public. City Attorney Pyburn provided additional background on the ballot initiative process.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Joseph J. Kavanagh, MMC
City Clerk

Date