

**Whatcom County  
Charter Review Commission  
Meeting Minutes**

March 8, 1995

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. at the Ferndale Library, 2222 Main Street, by Chairperson Kathy Sutter.

**II. Roll Call**

Present:

Keith Ahrens  
Joe Elenbaas  
Karen Frederick  
Yvonne Goldsmith  
Don Hansey  
Darlene McLeod  
Ron Polinder  
Ray Radke  
Mary Scrimsher  
Orphalee Smith  
Mary Stender  
Kathy Sutter  
Terry Unger

Absent, but excused:

Danna Beech  
Georgia Gardner

**III. Approval of the Agenda for Today's Meeting**

McLeod moved to approve the agenda.

Goldsmith seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

**IV. Introduction of Commissioners and Overview of Charter Review Commission**

The Commissioners introduced themselves to the members of the public.

V. Open Session - Public Comments

The Chair opened the floor for open session.

Speakers:

Matthew Blackwood, 2717 Yew St., Bellingham  
Thomas R. Martin, 1260 Paradise Way, Ferndale  
Bill Griffith, 1677 Seymour, Point Roberts

The Chair closed open session.

VI. Article III - Continuing Discussion of the Executive Branch

The Chair asked County Executive Shirley Van Zanten to continue discussing the Home Rule Charter. The Executive provided a handout of possible changes to the Home Rule Charter and discussed those suggestions.

The Chair called for a five minute break at 8:20 p.m.

The Chair reconvened the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

The Commission asked questions of County Executive Shirley Van Zanten, then continued discussing the Executive Branch.

The Chair re-opened the floor for open session.

Speaker: Bob Wiesen, 3314 Douglas Rd., Ferndale

The Chair closed open session.

Stender moved that we investigate and possibly allow for a political science intern from Western Washington University for spring term to do research and gather information for us as we discuss various issues. The intern would be under the direction of Stender.

McLeod seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Other business

Goldsmith moved to approve of the minutes from the February 22, 1995 meeting, as presented.

Radke seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Discussion of Next Agenda

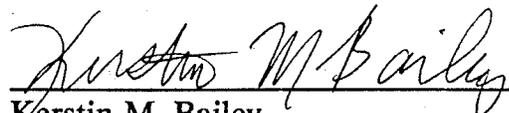
The Commission decided by consent to invite past and present Council Members to the next two meetings.

Items to be included on next agenda: call to order, roll call, approval of agenda, reading and approval of minutes, open session, discussion of legislative branch, other business, discussion of next agenda, and adjournment.

IX. Adjourn

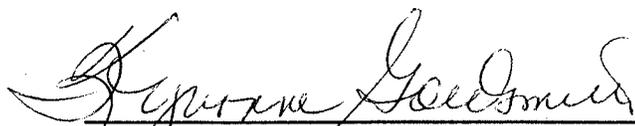
The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. by the Chair.

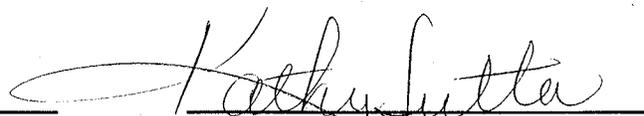
Respectfully submitted,

  
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Kerstin M. Bailey  
Recording Secretary

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WHATCOM COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Yvonne Goldsmith, Secretary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kathy Sutter, Commission Chair

**CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION  
SPEAKERS AT MARCH 8, 1995 MEETING**

1. Matthew Blackwood, 2717 Yew St., Bellingham 734-8261
  - The County Executive should be elected, so that the people can go to the poles and vote for the Executive.
  - The other courthouse officers should be elected.
  - The Executive's term, as well as the other courthouse officers' terms, should be four years, so that they can fulfill their agendas. Two years isn't long enough.
  - The other courthouse officers' offices should run independently from the Executive's office.
  - If there are term limits, they should be allowed at least two terms.
  
2. Thomas R. Martin, 1260 Paradise Way, Ferndale 384-1346
  - For nine years, I was a management systems analyst for a large county that had an appointed county executive. I never saw the squabbles that have gone on like we have in the last few years. The taxpayers probably not properly informed of the advantages of an appointed county executive.
  - Where I worked the Executive served the will of the Board. The Board of Supervisors could fire the Executive at any time. There was a good working relationship between the two. You should consider an appointed county executive.
  - Advantages of an appointed executive:
    - freedom to administer the county, and carry out executive duties without the pressures of having to be elected or re-elected,
    - freedom from some of the politics,
    - freedom to execute the policy as set down by the Board, just like a large company,
    - you can recruit people with degrees in public administration or have had such experience,
    - you can recruit people from other counties who have already filled a similar function, perhaps in a smaller county, or who have distinguished themselves and deserve to move up, as a career move.
  - Where I worked, the legislative body consisted of seven part-time members, although it was developing into a full-time job.
  - The Sheriff, Auditor, Treasurer, and Assessor were all elected. The Director of Public Works was not.
  - The Board of Supervisors were non-partisan offices run by districts.
  
3. Bill Griffith, 1677 Seymour, Point Roberts 945-1346  
(See hand-out)
  - The present districts allow Bellingham to dominate all three districts. It does not encourage our Council Members to be optimally sensitive to the legitimate concerns of people in unincorporated areas and small cities.
  - The succession movement is a legitimate response to the urban bias that is currently imposed and facilitated by having three districts, with Bellingham included in all

three. I suggest that the Commission consider the desirability of changing from the current three districts to seven districts with an equitable representation of rural areas and small town. If the district lines were structured so that Bellingham areas had exclusive representation, their representatives could also openly represent them. Council members from rural areas would be accountable to those rural areas. This redistricting would prevent the uninformed passage of unwise legislation that is hostile to the interests of those citizens living in small towns and rural areas.

-Only one Council Member could be elected from each district, and the Council Member at-large would be eliminated.

-Only voters residing in each of the seven council districts would be eligible to vote for the Council Member representing their district, thereby eliminating any urban domination.

-I prefer seven part-time Council Members to a smaller number of full-time Council Members, who might feel that they need a larger support staff and might contribute to an ever-expanding bureaucracy.

-No organizational structure is so bad that first-class people cannot make it work; likewise, no organizational structure is so good that third-rate people can't mess it up.

-We should keep the County Executive, Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer, and Sheriff elected. The number of officials in the Executive branch should not be increased.

-In the final analysis, the operation of Whatcom County government has been and will continue to be dependent on the quality and integrity of those people whom you and I elect.

4. **Bob Wiesen, 3314 Douglas Rd., Ferndale**

-The biggest issue that we have is how the Council should deal with public complaints that deal with administrative issues. I hope that you can come up with a mechanism, so that when people have a problem, they can get it resolved. I think that this is what's caused the biggest uproar over the past couple of years. People feel that if they have a problem, have been mistreated, or aren't getting correct information, they have nowhere to go. The frustration level is amazing. Somebody has to have the power to deal with it, if the Executive doesn't want to touch the issue. Otherwise, it's going to become explosive. We've got to have something better than what we've got, because if it keeps going on the track it's on now, it's going to bust up and not work for the benefit of the whole County.