

MINUTES OF MEETING
2026 CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
APRIL 22, 2026

Members Present: Chris Aiola, Andy Bemer, Collen, Hauer, Chris Klym, Dr. Al Melton,
Michael O'Donnell, Pat Roberts, and Peter Sullivan Jr.

Members Excused: Elizabeth Gerstenhaber

Presence Noted: Pamela Bobst, Mayor, Paul Shipp, City Council President, Councilman
Furry, Councilwoman Morris, and Councilwoman Havemann

Chairman Bemer opened the meeting at 6:01 PM and asked Member O'Donnell to review Article II and II of the charter tonight. Member O'Donnell wanted to quickly remind the other members that the charter itself is like the U.S. Constitution and its amendments. He stated that there is a delicate balance of what you find in a charter versus what is found in the city's codified ordinances. There are items that are more appropriately found in the charter as well as found in the codified ordinances. The charter is reserved for more of high level of organization, the form of government. The day-to-day policies of the city do not belong in charter. For example, the scheduling of leaf pick up in the Fall does not belong in the charter, whereas that decision should lie in the power of the mayor's office and everyday workings of the city government.

The next item to focus on is the procedure of discussion for this first full meeting of the charter review commission. Member O'Donnell stated that he is going to give the members an overview and some highlights of Article II and III in his opinion, have the invited guests speak if they like, and then have a group discussion of any items that may be placed on a master list for further discussion in a few weeks. That master list of discussion then will be the focus of our last two meetings or so where the commission will decide what changes to the charter we send to the residents for a vote this November.

Member O'Donnell asked Mayor Bobst to address the commission regarding Article II of the Charter which deals with the mayor of city. Mayor Bobst began her statement with the review of the city's strong mayor form of government and that council does have some power as well as outlined in the charter. She reviewed the administrative authority of the mayor, as well as the legislative authority of council in regard to budgetary power. She stated the charter has a clear delineation of roles between the executive branch and the legislative roles. The entire charter supports home rule of the city and provides appropriate level of transparency and provides flexibility for changes. She believes as the commission moves through this process, there are a few items that can be fine-tuned in the charter but overall, it serves everyone well.

Mayor Bobst then spoke of the 2-year term requirement of the charter, and she believes that there are three positive reasons as to why there is a 2-year term requirement. She stated that the first two reasons are very important in that one, this requirement provides a high level of accountability to the residents and the residents' ability to vote more often. They have the ability to vote every two years and able to be engaged every two years. They are more involved with the

candidates and the issues or more often. The 2-year term also provides a tremendous amount of momentum for the mayor and council. She stated she and council work together and have two years to get something accomplished and they better get something done. She stated that others say you cannot plan anything long term for the city. She stated that just look at the city campus right now. The city just finished a major project at the senior center and is now building a new fire station which took a few years to organize. She stated that this was all done without 4-year terms and if performance falls short, the residents have more frequent opportunities to vote on the candidate with the 2-year term. She stated that we have proven stability with the 2-year term and it has been highly successful with projects and planning overall. As a resident, she stated, the 2-year term served the city very well. This term also provides additional opportunities for others to serve in elective office, and individuals do not have to wait every 4 years for that opportunity to run if they like. Moving to a 4-year term is denying the citizens a voting privilege. The 2-year term keeps the candidates very aligned with the community.

Member O'Donnell thanked Mayor Bobst for her statement and acknowledged that he did receive the master list of discussion items from the last charter review commission and noted that the 2-year term limit was added but was eliminated by a vote of the commission to move it to the ballot. He then went on to go through what he thought were the highlights of Article II. He reviewed each section of the article and stated he did talk to the mayor about it. The qualification section points out that you must be a qualified elector, meaning you must be at least 18 to run for mayor. He asked the commission to give that thought. The vacancy and absence section of the article was reviewed by Member O'Donnell. The final section of duties and powers section was reviewed as well. He reviewed the legislative and judicial powers of this section too. He did point out that the council does pass legislation but must be signed by the mayor and if it is not signed, after 60 days it becomes the law of the city. He did open discussion up to the commission to discuss Article II. Member Melton then commented on the removal section of the mayor. He asked who was the one to actually make that decision of removal. The charter was not clear about that. Is there a vote of council he asked? If they are not willing to leave, how are they removed, he asked. Discussion between Member Klym and Member Melton continued with the definition of legally incompetent as stated in the article under Section 3 – Removal. Member O'Donnell stated that removal can proceed with the conviction of a felony but asked who is the one to take action on the actual removal. Member Klym stated that at that point if the mayor does not meet the qualifications of the office with the felony, then council can take the action of removal. Member Melton continued by stating what if the mayor's behavior is so egregious that they are not fit for the office, who then removes? Chairman Bemer stated that this is good point and that in Article III that addresses council, it clearly states how council can remove its own member, but not in Article II for the mayor. Member Melton asked what type of vote would occur, unanimous vote? Member Klym did point out that there is the option of Recall as well that is spelled out later in the city charter.

Chairman Bemer then turned to the subject of secondary employment. He stated that if the mayor wanted to get her real estate license, there is nothing in the charter from preventing her to do that. There are communities where the mayor is supposed to be on the job 24/7 but have other jobs as well. Mayor Bobst pointed out that charter stated that you cannot work the City of Rocky River while mayor. Chairman Bemer stated the point of language is to avoid conflict of interest. He then went to ask the mayor about term limits and the mayor stated that the voters will be able to

answer that question. He then brought up the topic of when the mayor is absent from the job for some reason. The Council President is supposed to step in the role temporarily while the mayor is absent and what if that official doesn't know the everyday role of the mayor. Mayor Bobst stated that with today's technology, that nobody is ever really away anymore. Other than maybe a medical reason, she was never available for any issue while she was away. She stated that technology is the game changer in regard to this section.

Member O'Donnell did state that the charter does use the pronoun "he" throughout the charter but this is addressed in Article X under the "use of pronouns". The mayor stated that we can change the pronouns to make them all gender neutral if wanted.

Member Roberts then spoke about the duties of the mayor. She acknowledged that the mayor has a number of duties and responsibilities. She stated that she did some due diligence in regard to the terms of the mayor, and she pointed out that we are the only city in Cuyahoga County that has a 2-year term. She stated that our charter goes back to 1960 so that is 66 years that we have been functioning like this and that in itself is amazing and has stood up against time. She understands the mayor's statements of support for the 2-year term, the only thing she had a concern with was that every 2 years all the seats are up for re-election. So technically, the city could have a wipe-out. She asked if the city charter could have staggered terms. Mayor Bobst then spoke about continuity of work with the professional staff. If the wipeout occurred, she asked the commission to remember that the leadership staff is still in place to keep the city functioning. She spoke of an instance before she was member of city council, of a zoning issue within the city which led 7 citizens running for council, and all 7 did win. Member Roberts spoke of continuity as well if there were rotating terms on council as well. She suggested maybe a hybrid created for council so there is always an existing person in place. Mayor Bobst then spoke of the protected seat and that is why the 2-year term was in place. There was concern that a 4-year term seat could run for Mayor and if they lose, they could possibly not lose their existing council seat. Member Roberts asked if we could look at options for this topic.

The focus then turned to Article III and Council President Shipp spoke to the commission. He began by stating that the mayor's position should be a 4-year term and currently we are the only city in the county with a 2-year term. He stated that this is not about any individual office holder and the system has functioned and is not chaos. He wanted to make sure that the charter is prepared for the long-term for the city to function. He asked the commission to consider a time when Mayor Bobst is not the mayor. He stated that the city has been incredibly blessed to have her as mayor and her stable leadership for 20 years. She has done very well and does the job well. He reviewed all her responsibilities and stated that she is planning on multi-year timelines and is always planning ahead. There is always a 5, 10, or 15 year plan going on and that is something a 2-year mayor term doesn't always align with in his opinion. Think about a new mayor coming into office and that first year they are going to be learning that job, and then the second year will be running for re-election. Will they be making the best decisions for the city in such a short timeline. He stated that he hopes the city voters would give the new mayor a chance, but that person may be voted out after 2 years, and then we start over. He stated that if you are always up for re-election, you are always campaigning. That is a tough spot for our city to be in. He stated that when a new mayor comes in, do the department heads leave, do they wonder about their job? That can contribute to instability. Council President Shipp stated that he worries about

the knowledge and connections the current mayor possesses and that a new mayor would not have the time to acquire the same with a 2-year term.

Council President then focused on city council. He stated that our neighboring cities have 4-year terms for the at-large positions and the ward seats have 2-year terms. That has a natural staggering effect so that you do not lose a lot of institutional knowledge. There is no instruction manual when you get elected, and projects could get interrupted, and there is a steep learning curve for a newly elected official. He thinks staggering and extending the term for the at-large seats would keep experience in place and the governance of the city would remain steady over time. He stated that he couldn't imagine 7 rookies at the council table with everything going on in the city. He proposes that the mayor serve a 4-year term and whatever best the commission thinks for making council seats more stable.

Councilwoman Havemann spoke next and agreed with the 4-year term for the mayor offices. With all the mayor's responsibilities, she stated that she has come to appreciate as a councilwoman everything she has done and all the pieces she has to put together. She stated that this would be difficult to do if a new person came in under a 2-year term and then another new person came in 2-years later. She believes that all the elected offices ending at the same time is a recipe for disaster and she has learned by observing everyone else and if she was new, she would not have anyone to learn from. As a female, she feels it would be nice to have gender neutral language. The surrounding communities use that language and would be nice, being a female, to read that neutral language.

Councilman Furry spoke next and stated that he believes that they should have a 4 year term and recognizes that everyone in this position goes through a learning curve. Technically, he stated that the city could have a new council and a new mayor all at one time. He does believe that doing staggered terms for the city is a good idea. He does believe that we should get rid of partisan elections. He stated that the city is only one of three in the county that has it. He stated that there is no Republican way or Democratic way to pick up garbage or plow the streets. With that, you still have to bring these changes to the voters and they decide.

Member O'Donnell then went through the highlights of Article III of the charter that deals with City Council. He read the sentence that deals with home rule and then recognizes the residency requirements for council as well. The discussion then turned to when council should convene to hold their organizational meeting to elect the Council President and Vice President. The charter states that the new sworn officers should meet no more than three days after their swearing in. Debate ensued on what happens if it falls on a weekend or if the commission can recommend just remove the three-day requirement. Member O'Donnell stated this hasn't been an issue as of yet, but it has jumped out to him. The topic of removal of a council member was next, and he can't remember if that has ever been used. He continued to read through the rest of Article III with no new recommendations for the remaining sections. The topic then turned to updating language regarding the posting of legislation and ordinances. Currently, the charter requires posting a hard copy in the lobby of City Hall and Member Melton pointed out that the charter still requires the city to post in the newspaper. He asked what about just posting on the website for the city. Member Roberts then stated that we should look at that language later and discuss

the transparency and the technology available now for those actions. He then concluded his summary of the highlights and then opened it up for discussion.

Chairmember Bemer pointed out that the city does follow Robert's Rules of Order as pointed out in the Ohio Revised Code. He also wanted to discuss the topic of zoning in the city in that it can be changed by a vote of the public or legislative process. It is not an administrative process. Our process in place here has worked pretty well over the past years.

Charter Secretary Greco then clarified for the commission that there will be a Master List of Items for Further Discussion and from there, the commission will vote on what items then to send to the ballot for the public to vote on. That discussion will come in a few weeks after all the charter articles have been reviewed. Chairman Bemer then stated that at least two members of the commission will need to vote yes to place an item on the Master List of Further Discussion. Member Melton asked for clarification on when municipal elections are held and Chairman Bemer stated that those elections are held statutorily and are set by state and federal law. There was further discussion of whether to ask the voters to change the date of the organizational meeting and concluded that it will remain off the Master List of Discussion. Member O'Donnell did point out that the discussion of partisan elections will come when the commission discusses Article IX Nominations and Elections. Finally, the members did ask for ballot history regarding when term limits have been sent to the voters of Rocky River. Charter Secretary stated that he will research that and then send it everyone. After all of the members spoke, there were five items place on the master list:

Article II – Mayor Section 1 Term – have a discussion on changing the term of the mayor from 2 years to 4 years

Article II – Mayor – Section 2 Qualifications – have a discussion regarding the consideration of outside employment

Article II – Mayor – Section 3 Removal – have a discussion on who initiates the vote for the removal of the mayor

Article III – Council – Section 2 – Term of Office – have a discussion of staggered terms and changing some position from 2-year terms to 4- year terms

Article III – Council – Section 15 – Legislative Procedure – have a discussion regarding the methods of posting various notices using latest technology

Charter Secretary Greco reviewed the task list that was set by the commission for the next meeting.

The next meeting of the Charter Review Commission will be held at 6:00 p.m. on April 29, 2026. The invited guests will be the Law Director, Safety Service Director and the Finance Director to discuss Article IV – Administrative Departments and Article VII Finance.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.