

November 4, 2009

Dear City of Pensacola Voters:

We've read the City of Pensacola's Official Referendum Information brochure. It never explains "Why?" we should so radically change our form of government.

The City's "educational material" leaves out important factual information. We will no longer be allowed to challenge council decisions relating to the "annual budget, levying taxes, or setting salaries of City officers or employees." Term limits are not retroactive. The council keeps appointing non-city residents to city boards and commissions.

The final Pensacola Charter Review Commission members were Floyd Armstrong, James Hinson, Larry Hicks, Robert Holmes, Sam Horton, Barbara Mayall, Natalie Prim, Ed Ranelli, James Reeves, DeeDee Ritchie, Crystal Spencer and Ed Turner.

They participated in a protracted but flawed study process. A majority openly expressed "Strong Mayor" and "Consolidated Government" agendas. Chairwoman Spencer refused to submit the commission's Final Report. The council knew everything but publically pretended not to notice.

You've seen former Chairwoman Spencer on television lecturing the council, "The people want change!" She's right in a sense. People always want change for the better. But they usually don't want it just for the sake of doing something different. It's always better to know what's broken before you try to fix it.

I expressed my concerns about the missing Final Report to Mayor Mike Wiggins. Mayor Wiggins told me he didn't think he had the authority to make the Pensacola Charter Review Commission members write its Final Report because they're volunteers. He should have just ordered them back to work...or else.

I attended multiple Pensacola Charter Review Commission meetings, testified at some, and reviewed its meeting video tapes, minutes and other documents. I've spoken with people involved on all sides of the issue. I'm not part of any group. My independent observations on the Pensacola Charter Review Commission's "process" are summarized in the following two pages. Please consider them too when deciding how to vote.

Respectfully,

C.J. Lewis

The Pensacola Charter Review Commission’s “process was broken from start to finish”:

- “I have found an unbelievable misunderstanding of what is going on here.” – Mayor Wiggins
- “The charter review process was flawed. There was no comprehensive review of the current charter or governmental operations.” – University of West Florida independent consultant William Haraway, PhD who resigned in protest
- When Dr. Haraway testified to describe the Pensacola Charter Review Commission (CRC) process he mentioned Chairwoman Spencer. Councilman Sam Hall angrily accused Dr. Haraway of “character assassination.” Spencer’s husband, her law partner and their business partner were all “major” contributors to his last political campaign.
- The CRC wanted to reduce the council to seven members. Councilman Hall expressed his concern about “white voter dilution” and pressured the CRC to “add back” the two at-large council seats. He also may not have wanted to face his District 2 neighbor at-large Councilwoman Diane Mack in a November 2010 election.
- The CRC wanted the mayor and council to only appoint city residents to city boards and commissions. The public very strongly supported the idea. The council persuaded the CRC to drop the recommendation.

The Pensacola Charter Review Commission had “a Strong Mayor agenda”:

- A “Strong Mayor” will give area businessmen just one person who can give them a decision.
– 2008 comment to C.J. Lewis by Strong Mayor movement leader and Marcus Pointe resident John Peacock
- “The CRC chair [Crystal Spencer] had a "strong mayor" agenda and steered the process in that direction from the start.” – E-mail from Councilwoman Mack
- Mayor Wiggins and past Mayors John Fogg and Jerry Maygarden all testified before the CRC. They each proposed improving rather than replacing our 78 year old Council-Manager form of government. Mayors Fogg suggested adding a full-time “Leadership Mayor” as they have in Austin’s Council-Manager government.
- The National Civic League’s Model City Charter “strongly endorses” our present Council-Manager form of government. All powers of our city are vested in a popularly elected council that exercise unified legislative and executive policy functions. Chairwoman Spencer once held the Model City Charter above her head and said she wasn’t going to use it. The CRC’s webpage still reads: “Model City Charter (not yet available).”
- “I am writing to express my full and sincere desire for a Strong Mayor form of government.”
– E-mail from Maritime Park spokeswoman and non-city resident Jane Birdwell, read aloud by Chairwoman Spencer just moments before the CRC voted 7-3 to change our form of government

The Pensacola Charter Review Commission had “a Consolidated Government agenda”:

- Chairwoman Spencer had the CRC study the charters of six Strong Mayor-led cities having “county-sized populations.” Chairwoman Spencer said she was, “Looking more towards our community geographically, something more of a 300,000 population than the 55,000 population we have.”
- Commissioner Ritchie told Mayor Fogg the CRC “had” to address the issue of consolidated government. Mayor Fogg said the CRC was not to consider consolidated government – “at all.” Mayor Fogg’s stern warning was not even recorded in the meeting minutes.
- Chairwoman Spencer told the CRC she had been called by Escambia All For One Consolidated Government advocate John Peacock “informing her of the timeline for the consolidation effort.”
- As Commissioner Ritchie prepared to vote she said, “I think it’s important that we make bold moves that set the stage for consolidation.” Commissioner Ranelli emphasized that recommendations should be “consistent with consolidation.” Chairwoman Spencer added, “How goes Pensacola so goes Escambia County!”

The Pensacola Charter Review Commission “refused to submit its Final Report”:

- “The CRC shall prepare its recommendations for amendments, deletions, or new provisions as a single item in a final report to the City Council.” – Council instructions to the CRC when they began their work
- The CRC drafted an entirely new 24 page charter it submitted as a single item. Unused parts of the old charter needed to be converted into municipal ordinances. The CRC failed to list the parts needing conversion.
- The CRC refused to submit its comprehensive and explanatory Final Report. Chairwoman Spencer claimed the new charter document (“a single item”) was also the Final Report. When the public became angry Chairwoman Spencer simply inserted the words “Final Report” into the charter document’s title.
- “At no time did I ever tell Ms. Spencer a new proposed charter could be substituted for a report.”
– E-mail from former City Manager Tom Bonfield given to the council and ignored
- Chairwoman Spencer initially said “a two month public awareness campaign” would be needed to educate voters. During a recent council meeting she instructed the public to watch the 29 2-3 hour long CRC meeting videos and read the meeting minutes and other documents if they wanted to understand the charter document.
- “There is a lot of confusion out there!” – Councilwoman Megan Pratt