

**CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION  
CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS SUB-COMMITTEE  
Minutes of Meeting  
April 15, 2010**

A meeting of the Constitutional Officers sub-Committee of the Charter Review Commission (CRC) was held at the Administration Complex, Room 106-B, Port Charlotte, Florida.

Roll Call:

The following members were present:

*Maureen Garrard (Chairman), Andy Dodd, Joseph Goggin, Suzanne Graham*

The following alternates were present:

*Patricia Kelly*

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. EST by *Chairman Garrard*

Agenda Items:

1. **Approval of Minutes** of March 18, 2010 Meeting: *Chairman Garrard* confirmed that all of the members present had previously reviewed a copy of these Minutes. There being no additions nor deletions the motion to approve these Minutes was made and seconded and the Minutes were accepted by unanimous vote. In addition, the members approved revisions made to the posted Minutes of March 4, 2010, pursuant to modifications submitted via email by Honorable Paul Stamoulis, Supervisor of Elections.

2 **Interview with Charlotte County Sheriff Bill Cameron.** *Chairman Garrard* and the sub-Committee members welcomed Sheriff Cameron and thanked him for attending. *Ms. Garrard* invited Sheriff Cameron to begin by describing his office and duties. Sheriff Cameron said that he is one of the Constitutional Officers, as are the other offices of Sheriff throughout the State. Mr. Cameron added that only in Miami Dade is the position not elected. Sheriff Cameron described Charlotte County as unique as there is only one municipality within the County. Mr. Cameron said that the Sheriff's Office has two Statutory requirements: law enforcement duties and also officer of the Courts. Mr. Cameron added that in Charlotte County the Sheriff is responsible for operation of the jail, although that is not one of his Statutory requirements. In response to a question from *Chairman Garrard*, Mr. Cameron clarified that by Ordinance he is designated as Chief Correctional Officer, but the County jail is the responsibility of each county government. He added that how the jail is run varies in different counties, but there are three models in the State : (a) A Sheriff run jail, the method used by fifty eight counties; (b) a jail run by a private company; or (c) the jail run as a Department of the county. Sheriff Cameron observed that many counties have determined that having the Sheriff run the jail is the most efficient alternative,

adding that in Charlotte County this has been very successful as evidenced by the low incident of lawsuits or escapes. Mr. Cameron said that the Charlotte County Sheriff's office is large for a County this size because of the fact that there is only one municipality. He said that he has 617 full time employees plus 30 or so part time. *Chairman Garrard* asked if this number included the jail staff and Sheriff Cameron replied that it included law enforcement, Courts and the jail staff. He indicated that the largest part of the employment figure, as well as the budget, was law enforcement. He said that the jail was second and the Court staff was the smallest. In reference to the Court system, Mr. Cameron indicated that he provides bailiffs to the Courts and civil process servers. Sheriff Cameron indicated his pride in the Department, saying that he has been with this Department for six years and the level of professionalism has greatly improved. *Ms. Garrard* asked Mr. Cameron to expand on that. Sheriff Cameron said that earlier in his law enforcement career he was employed by Lee County, and that it used to be the perception among law enforcement that Charlotte was a "trainer" agency, a place where people started but did not stay. He cited poor pay/benefits in comparison to other areas, poor equipment and erratic leadership. Sheriff Cameron said that was a shame for those individuals who wanted to make this agency their careers, as you cannot separate yourself from your leader. Sheriff Cameron said that training has always been strong in Charlotte County, and indicated that now instead of losing candidates to other counties they have a waiting list. Sheriff Cameron added that Charlotte County is now regarded around the State as an industry leader. *Chairman Garrard* asked Mr. Cameron about crime rate and he responded that it was excellent not only locally but on the State and national level, despite current economic conditions. Mr. Cameron continued that the Manhattan Institute has recently published new findings which debunk previously held theories. He said that rather than addressing social ills it has been found that aggressive law enforcement and longer detention times are responsible for lowering crime rates. Mr. Cameron added that technology advancements have helped with apprehension and incarceration. Sheriff Cameron referred to the current level of staffing in his Department, which allows him to keep officers on the street as well as a team of undercover policeman who can be pro-active and aggressive as they do not have to follow up every call. He added that staffing numbers have gone down in the last few years and he does not want to have to reduce them further. *Andy Dodd* asked if the figure of 620 full time employees was where the Department was six years ago, and Sheriff Cameron clarified that he was referring to the staffing level (ratio of officers to population) as being where the Department was six years ago.

What is your opinion of non-partisan elections for Constitutional Officers? Sheriff Cameron indicated that he was not in favor of non-partisan elections. He said that party affiliation is valuable so that the voter can identify with a candidate's philosophies, particularly fiscal philosophy. Mr. Cameron added that during a campaign the candidate cannot possibly meet every voter and his or her party affiliation is the only way the voter will know them. Mr. Cameron observed that even when non-partisan elections are held, the candidate still reflects himself by a party.

What is your opinion on setting term limits for Constitutional Officers? Sheriff Cameron replied that for the five Constitutional Officers there is no need to set term limits as the voters decide the limit. He pointed out that the Constitutional Officers are carrying out a function and are not lawmakers, adding that there could be an argument in favor of term limits for the Board as they are legislators. Sheriff Cameron added that although he is not necessarily a proponent of term limits, they would prevent a legislator from becoming too powerful or making the position a career. He said that for exactly those reasons he favors term limits at the Federal level.

What is your opinion on changing the Constitutional Officers to an appointed position rather than elected? Sheriff Cameron replied that he was not in favor of any appointed Constitutional Officer from Commissioner on down. He referred to the purposeful system of checks and balances in County government. Mr. Cameron continued by saying that he especially would not be in favor of an appointed Sheriff, indicating that the Sheriff is the only protector of the Constitution at the local level just as the Attorney General is at the State level. Sheriff Cameron pointed out that a Sheriff working for government in that capacity would not be able to speak his mind and would have to please his employers. Mr. Cameron again indicated that the Constitutional Officers are responsible to the people and that should not change.

Tell us about your budget process : *Chairman Garrard* observed that the Sheriff has the largest budget of the Constitutional Officers but also a separate and important mission. Sheriff Cameron confirmed for *Ms. Garrard* that all of his 617 employees belong to one of five bargaining unions, with the exception of those holding the rank of Captain and above. He indicated that eighty (80%) percent of his budget is personnel costs, leaving roughly twenty (20%) percent for everything else. He said that his budget falls into three categories: personnel, capital costs (cars/guns) and operation (bullets/ticket books and other consumables). Mr. Cameron said that he does not incur any building costs as the County has to supply and maintain buildings for the Constitutional Officers. He said that he submits two budgets on his behalf and one on behalf of the County. He continued that he submits a law enforcement budget and a Courts budget. He also submits an operational budget for the jail, saying that everything else to do with the jail is in the County budget. Sheriff Cameron explained that the jail expansion cost has nothing to do with his Office or his budget, it is a County cost. Mr. Cameron said that his budget has never decreased historically, it has always increased. He said the reason for this is that costs always increase and to even maintain at the same level would cost more every year. He added that State mandates can be very costly also. Mr. Cameron said that his employees are in the State retirement system and the State sets those rates. He said that without any other changes that alone will cost him \$500,000 more than last year to just maintain at the current level. He indicated that he would have to find somewhere else in the budget to cut that amount, acknowledging that there is no additional money available. Mr. Cameron said that they take a lot of measures to keep insurance costs from rising. He also said that he does not enter into multi-year contracts with unions. Mr. Cameron indicated that there have been no raises in three years, they are holding insurance costs and retirement costs, and he cut 20 positions last year. Also, they have terminated the contract to run the jail kitchen and they are now doing that themselves. He said that they have a fish farm, grow vegetables and raise chickens. *Chairman Garrard* asked if the Sheriff still contracts with the Federal government for prisoners, remarking that used to be lucrative. Sheriff Cameron said that they currently do not have available beds but they will when the new facility opens and are in negotiations with both the Federal government and DeSoto County to rent bedspace as a source of revenue. *Chairman Garrard* also asked about a regional facility and Sheriff Cameron indicated that the need for that no longer existed.

Do you have any other forms of funding? Sheriff Cameron replied that all of his budget comes from tax dollars. He said that a small amount can be obtained from fines and forfeitures. For example the Clerk's Office by Statute can add few dollars to a citation which goes into a law enforcement trust fund which he can use to offset certain costs subject to restrictions. Mr. Cameron said that his office can receive

both Federal and State forfeiture money, adding that his office belongs to a Federal task force with the DEA and as such can receive about 1/5 of the asset value of seizures. This money is also subject to restrictions. Mr. Cameron indicated that they try to use the money from drug forfeitures to purchase the drugs used in the process of apprehending dealers.

What are your observations regarding the relationship of the Constitutional Officers and the Board of County Commissioners? Sheriff Cameron observed that in this County the relationship is a good one. He said that all five Constitutional Officers meet frequently and share best practice ideas. He added that all of the five Constitutional Officers and the five Commissioners are equal, saying that issues are usually always settled respectfully and professionally.

What percentage of your budget is related to the jail and jail staff? Sheriff Cameron broke down his budget figures as follows: \$57.5 million total budget of which \$37.5 million is staff, \$1.5 million is Court related and \$18.5 million to operate the jail. In response to a question from *Chairman Garrard*, Sheriff Cameron said that the inmates have an Inmate Welfare Account funded by anything that they buy in the jail (such as a candy bar or a phone call) and the money can be used for anything that benefits them. He said that for example they buy the chickens they are raising and built the fish farm and hydroponic vegetable garden. Mr. Cameron also mentioned utilizing skills among the inmate population, giving as an example a painting project that was done whereby the County bought the paint and some inmates with painting experience did the job.

*Andy Dodd* asked Sheriff Cameron if he was an advocate of pre-trial release and if it was done in Charlotte County. Sheriff Cameron replied that he was an advocate, adding that in this County it is a function of the Court. He mentioned a pending bill in the House, saying that some Sheriffs are against it as the effects on jails is not known. Sheriff Cameron said it is a good program and he hopes it can continue to be run at a County level without State input.

**3. Public Input:** Citizen Joe Blais of the Englewood East Neighborhood Watch praised Mr. Cameron and his Department. He mentioned a Citizens Academy that is available and recommends that people attend. Sheriff Cameron supported that, comparing it to going behind the scenes and seeing how the rides operate at Disney. Mr. Blais also praised the Department's persistence and tenacity in routing out prescription drug offenses. Sheriff Cameron commented on the fact that this is becoming a costly undertaking with the amount of "buy" money that is needed. He added that Florida has now passed a prescription drug monitoring bill which has not yet been put into effect. He elaborated that the major chain stores are connected (all Walgreens or all CVS pharmacies) so they can compare information within the chain but not among each other. Ken Doherty asked Sheriff Cameron to stay abreast of the activities of the CRC, mentioning that there were some possible changes in the form of government up for discussion.

**4 Committee Comments:** Prior to the arrival of Sheriff Cameron, Chairman Garrard suggested the sub-committee begin a review in anticipation of developing the final report. There was no time for any discussion and this was deferred to the next meeting.

*Chairman Garrard* and the sub-Committee members thanked Sheriff Cameron for his time and courtesy in attending.

5. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m. EDT

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Maureen Garrard, Chairman