

**City of Plainfield, New Jersey**  
**Charter Study Commission**  
**Minutes**  
**Minutes of Meeting of Thursday, May 9, 2013, 7:30 p.m.**  
**Plainfield City Hall Library**

**Call to Order:** Mr. Stewart called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

**Salute to the Flag:** Mrs. Davis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**The Open Public Meeting Act Compliance Statement:** Ms. Criscione announced that the Notice Requirement provided for in the Open Public Meeting Law had been satisfied. Notice was properly given, said notice having been transmitted to the Courier-News and the Star-Ledger on 4/25/13, as well as posting on the City website and on the City Clerk's bulletin board.

**Roll Call:** Mr. Stewart took roll call. Secretary Mary Burgwinkle, Treasurer Jeanette Criscione, Assistant Secretary Marie Davis and Vice Chair John Stewart were all present. Chair Rick Smiley was excused.

**Minutes:** The Minutes of Meeting of May 2, 2013 were approved in a unanimous vote with no dissents or abstentions.

**Interviews:** Live interviews were conducted of Mr. William Reid (City Council, Ward 1) and Mrs. Vera Greaves (City Council, Wards 1 and 4). Attached as Exhibit A are the interview questions and a brief summary of the remarks of Mr. Reid and Mrs. Greaves.

**Correspondence to Commission:** Ms. Burgwinkle indicated that there was ongoing correspondence with representatives from other communities with Faulkner Act forms of government about attendance at our 5/23 and 5/30 meetings. Dr. Reock will speak at our 5/23 meeting, about Faulkner Act forms. Mr. James White, Township Administrator from East Brunswick (Faulkner Act Mayor-Council) and Mr. Chris Rath, Township Manager from Roxbury, NJ (Faulkner Act Council-Manager) who was referred by the Municipal Managers Association, will be our expert speakers on Faulkner Act forms. Also, Councilor Tracey Brown had a conflict for the 5/9 meeting and needs to be rescheduled and we are in the process of scheduling the interview of Mr. Elliot Simmons, former City Council, Ward 4. We are running out of regular meeting dates, so Ms. Burgwinkle and Mrs. Davis will interview Ms. Brown and Mr. Simmons in a subcommittee meeting to be scheduled and it will be noticed on the CSC blog.

**Treasurer Report:** Ms. Criscione reported that the City Clerk has given her a contact regarding publishing public notices and she will report at an upcoming meeting about a cost estimate for publishing our final report in the Courier and Star Ledger in the event we decide to do that.

**New Business:**

**-Discussion of agendas for the next several meetings, and possibly adding a meeting on 5/16/13.**

Ms. Burgwinkle referred to the previous discussion of meeting dates through 5/30 and proposed that CSC add a meeting on 5/16 to continue the line by line discussion of the Plainfield Charter (1968) in the second floor Planning Conference Room. A motion to add the meeting passed with no discussion, abstentions or dissent. Ms. Burgwinkle will contact the City Clerk on 5/10 to give notice of the meeting.

**-Commissioner Working Meeting, time permitting.**

In view of the vote to add a meeting, the working meeting was deferred to 5/16.

**Announce date and time of next meeting:** Thursday, 5/16/13 at 7:30 pm in City Hall Planning Conference Room.

**Public Participation:** No members of the public requested to be heard (observers were allowed to ask questions during the interviews).

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

## Exhibit A

Following are interview questions and a brief summary of Mr. Reid's and Mrs. Greaves' comments.

**1. Please briefly introduce yourself and describe your present or former role in Plainfield's government.**

**Mr. Reid:** Mr. Reid described his extensive experience in the private and public sectors in Newark, Orange, Asbury Park and Plainfield, with an emphasis on Housing Authority expertise. He has been Treasurer under ELEC for many Plainfield Candidates over the years, and for Democratic City Committee. He has served on PMUA as commissioner, as City Councilor from Ward 1, as Chair of Plainfield Redevelopment Authority under Rick Taylor. Is currently City Councilor from Ward 1 and is on the Planning Board.

**Mrs. Greaves:** My name is Vera Greaves, was appointed in 2/2011 to an unexpired term on City Council, was elected in the 2011 general election to the Wards 1 - 4 seat on City Council.

**2. Have you read Plainfield's City Charter?**

**Mr. Reid:** Yes

**Mrs. Greaves:** yes

**3. What do you consider to be the most important advantages of Plainfield's present form of local government, the Plainfield City Charter? What are its disadvantages, in your opinion?**

**Mr. Reid:** the advantages are the two bodies, the administration for policy and council with a role of oversight, and we have professional management (City Administrator) for money matters. Disadvantage is that there is no way to handle the differences of opinion and political differences (used WBLS matter as an example), but he is not sure that anything in the charter could handle this in any event.

**Mrs. Greaves:** Disadvantage is that since the state legislature enacted it, the counsel cannot amend it, only the state legislature can amend it.

**4. Is there anything in the Plainfield City Charter that hindered you from carrying out your role in Plainfield's government?**

**Mr. Reid:**No

**Mrs. Greaves:** No

**5. If your answer to Question 8 was yes, were the provisions of the Plainfield City Charter the problem or do you believe that the Charter was being interpreted incorrectly?**

**Mr. Reid:** N/A

**Mrs. Greaves:** N/A

**6. If you have had experience with forms of municipal government other than Plainfield's City Charter, how did the operation of the municipal government under those forms compare?**

**Mr. Reid:** Has worked for Newark, Orange, Asbury Park and Plainfield. All of the them were the same, it is the people, really. If you have good people, you have good government.

**Mrs. Greaves:** No other experience.

**7. What is your opinion on the number of City Council members under the Plainfield City Charter? Is the City Council too large or too small? Should there be one City Councilor from each ward, and three elected at large from the whole City, rather than 1-4, 2-3 and one at large? Should all City Councilors be elected at large?**

**Mr. Reid:** Number of 7 is a good number, should not be less. Should be one from each ward, he likes the 1-4, 2-3 because the 1-4 councilor helps out a lot in his ward. Does not agree with all elected at large.

**Mrs. Greaves:** She believes that it should stay the way that it is, does not see a reason to change it.

**8. Should City Councilors be compensated or should they receive \$1 per year for their services as in some other municipalities? Should the council receive benefits?**

**Mr. Reid:** He has suggested raising the city council salary from \$9,000 to \$15,000 and the president and the committee chair should get an extra \$1,000. City Council is a job and they work, going to City Council and other meetings (he is on Planning Board, for instance. He runs into people at the grocery store and the gas station, and listens to their issues, and he contacts City Departments to look into issues in his ward. Council should be paid for that work and get benefits if they choose to. He, however, would refuse benefits such as cell phone and car. Believes that those types of benefits are the first things that people attack when they try to derail you.

**Mrs. Greaves:** The City Council should be compensated and receive benefits.

**9. in your opinion, should the City Clerk, who acts as clerk of the City Council, is appointed by the Mayor or by the City Council?**

**Mr. Reid:** Should stay the same, Mayor appoints and City Council reviews. Also, we are fortunate in Plainfield, only two City Clerks over many years; issue does not come up often.

**Mrs. Greaves:** I believe that the City Council should appoint the City Clerk.

**10. Do you think that the Plainfield City Charter could be improved in any way that would enhance the working relationship between the Mayor and City Council?**

**Mr. Reid:** No, does not think that the City Charter has anything to do with the working relationship, should not tamper with the charter for political reasons. We need people with many different thoughts and ideas who can work with people and take care of the entire city, charter cannot improve that relationship.

**Mrs. Greaves:** No, we are all different people with different personalities and the Charter cannot dictate how we relate to one another.

**11. the Plainfield City Charter provides for three City Departments, Administration and Finance, Public Works and Public Affairs and Safety.**

**(a) Do you believe that the current city divisions are assigned to the appropriate Departments for peak efficiency?**

**(b) Should the Plainfield City Charter be changed to allow for between 3 and 6 Departments, to be established by ordinance?**

**(c) Does Plainfield need the Department of Public Affairs and Safety in its current form?**

**Mr. Reid:** If everyone does their jobs for the good of the city, no need to tamper with assignment of divisions. He does believe that Urban Development should be part of Public Works. We should separate and try to get a development department so that we can try to take advantage of the kind of development that is going on in the little cities around us such as Cranford and Garwood. Regarding the Department of Public Affairs, the mayor should be a boss; he has worked for Mayors who were bosses. They have to set their policies and make sure that the police are doing their work in a strong way. He thinks that the operation that we have now works for us.

**Mrs. Greaves:** Mrs. Greaves did not wish to answer this question.

**12. Do you believe that the Office of Corporation Counsel can properly represent both the Mayor and City Council as provided in the Plainfield City Charter? Should there be a provision for separate counsel for the governing body? Should there be full time in-house Corporation Counsel?**

**Mr. Reid:** Lawyers must explain the law as it is, or risk their license. City Council did get into some arguments over this, and people see that office as a political and partisan office. It is true that the lawyer can be fired, but if you are not doing your job correctly, you should get fired. If you get a lawyer who understands his role, he can represent both. He is representing the City, not the Council or the Mayor. We spend a lot of money on extra lawyers. If we could get around some of this by having Corporation Counsel who is not political and doing the job, would be better. We can handle the need for attorneys for Council by hiring counsel in situations where there is a conflict. He believes that we should have corporation counsel full time, because City has challenges every day. Corporate Council should sign off on expenditures and contracts in excess of the threshold, and should understand municipalities and the office he holds.

**Mrs. Greaves:** There should be full time in house counsel, and separate attorney for the City Council.

**13. The Plainfield City Charter provides for initiative and referendum upon petitions with signatures of 20% of registered city voters, and for recall of elected officials with signatures of 33 1/3 % of registered voters. Should the Plainfield City Charter be amended to follow the Faulkner Act (10%-15% of voters who voted in the last election for initiative and referendum under circumstances described in the law and 25% for recall)? Should the recall percentage be less than 25%?**

**Mr. Reid:** He does not recall any referendum or recall activity, so leave it the way it is.

**Mrs. Greaves:** Should not be less than 25%, should be more if anything.

**14. In your opinion, should Plainfield have more or fewer Wards? Would more or fewer Wards provide better representation for all constituencies?**

**Mr. Reid:** He does not think that we need more wards, does not think that it would improve representation, all city councilors work hard now.

**Mrs. Greaves:** She thinks that the set up is fine the way that it is.

**15. What is your opinion of non-partisan local elections (for Mayor and City Council) rather than primaries and partisan local elections?**

**Mr. Reid:** Everywhere he has worked, it is the same whether partisan or non-partisan elections. In the quest for power, everyone will get involved in the elections. Everyone is partisan personally and elections are partisan, regardless.

**Mrs. Greaves:** Stay the way it is, non-partisan would cost the City more and not be better.

**16. How does the Plainfield City Charter work with the Plainfield Municipal Code? Were they used together consistently in your experience? If NO, what is your recommendation?**

**Mr. Reid:** They work together, does not remember a question coming up.

**Mrs. Greaves:** They have to work together for Council to get work done.

**17. Are there any provisions of the Plainfield City Charter that you think can be improved? If so what do you suggest?**

**Mr. Reid:** Just the department change that I mentioned early. We also ran into a problem whether we could fine someone as provided in the Charter, but were told that we could not legally do that, need to resolve that.

**Mrs. Greaves:** The main thing is that people have to work together, if we decide to bicker among ourselves and not get anything done, there is not a thing that the Charter can do about it. We have to learn how to get along and how to agree to disagree pleasantly.

**18. Do you have any other observations that you would like to share about the provisions of Plainfield City Charter?**

**Mr. Reid:** It is a nice, compact, simply written document. Was surprised how small it was when I first saw it. No other comments.

**Mrs. Greaves:** If it is not broken, don't fix it.