

Pepper Pike Charter Review Commission Executive Summary of Report to Pepper Pike City Council

The Pepper Pike Charter Review Commission (“the Commission”) was established by the Pepper Pike City Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the City’s Charter. The goal of this review, as directed by Ordinance 2024-13, passed on April 17, 2024, is to ensure that the Charter reflects current best practices for a responsive, transparent, and effective local government.

The Commission was sworn in at an organizational meeting on July 31, 2024, then began the process of reviewing the Charter. The Commission solicited input from residents, the Mayor, members of City Council, and employees of Pepper Pike. Residents were apprised of the process and encouraged to submit input by means of a letter mailed to all residents, as well as four emails sent to Pepper Pike residents on the City’s email distribution list and inclusion in three of the monthly Pepper Pike Post newsletters. The Commission met seventeen times between July 31 and December 19, 2024, for a total of over 36 hours. The schedule of meetings was posted on the City website and included in the email updates sent to residents, all meetings were open to the public, and public comment was welcomed at all meetings. The minutes of Commission meetings and a redline draft of the charter are, and have been throughout the Commission’s review process, posted on the City website. The Mayor and the Council’s designated liaisons to the Commission attended Commission meetings, as did the City Law Director, who provided input and advice throughout the review process.

This review marks the first in-depth examination of the Charter since its original adoption in 1966, and it represents a commitment to upholding and modernizing the principles that govern Pepper Pike. This report summarizes the items considered by the Commission, the Commission’s recommended improvements to the Charter, as well as items that were considered but did not result in recommended changes.

In reviewing the Charter, the Charter Review Commission was guided by its charge to ensure that the Charter reflects current best practices for a responsive, transparent, collaborative, and effective local government. As is noted above, throughout the process, the Commission solicited and carefully considered input from Pepper Pike elected officials and community members, consulted with Council liaisons and the City Law Director, and studied charters of neighboring communities. Commission members met extensively in the past approximately five months. This Report is the culmination of the Commission’s examination and careful consideration of the current City Charter.

The Commission’s recommendations primarily fall within four categories:

1. Revisions to update language that is antiquated, archaic, no longer in accordance with Ohio law, or no longer relevant to the City (several of which were suggested by the City Law Director), and largely non-substantive revisions in the interest of clarity and consistency.

2. The addition of provisions that are common to most modern city charters and are intended to establish “guardrails” to protect the City, including establishing qualifications for elected officials and setting forth rules allowing for the removal of elected and appointed officials under defined circumstances. The recommendation to restructure the City Planning Commission is in response to concerns expressed by Council members and the public that the current structure, with the Mayor serving as the Chair and a voting member, as well as appointing all three elector members, is not ideal. The revised structure is intended to increase community involvement, increase the representation and voting power of the appointed electors, and provide for appointment of the elector representatives by all eight of the City’s elected officials. Additionally, given the importance of zoning changes, the Commission recommends that the requirements for giving notice of proposed zoning changes be updated to provide for a method that will reasonably notify residents and other potentially impacted parties.
3. The recommendation to establish the position of the Council President comes in response to a very significant amount of input from City elected officials and community members documenting shortfalls in communication between the executive and legislative branches of our City government. They have told the Commission that frequent last minute agenda changes have led to inefficiencies, as Council members often do not have enough time to review proposed legislation or the supporting documents prior to meetings and, thus, must do their due diligence and ask a lot of questions during the meeting, which leads to lengthier Council meetings and, on occasion, an inability for Council members to comfortably vote on a matter. An overwhelming majority of municipalities in Cuyahoga County have Council Presidents, including the neighboring communities of Chagrin Falls, Gates Mills, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, and Orange Village. Council members also told the Commission that having a President would allow them to function more efficiently as a legislative body. Creating this position will provide for a clearer separation of powers between the City’s legislative and executive branches and will provide a point of contact in the legislative branch for community members. Though communication and collaboration cannot be legally mandated, the structural changes recommended by the Commission, along with the provisions that the Mayor and the President of Council shall confer with each other, should encourage and facilitate communication and collaboration within our City government, resulting in a more responsive, transparent, and effective local government.
4. The addition of a mandated periodic charter review process, by a commission of citizens, every six years. This process will allow citizens to evaluate the effectiveness of any revisions adopted as a result of this Commission’s work, as well as whether changes are warranted to reflect changes in our City, technology, or whatever the future might hold.

The Commission’s focus was on the Charter. The impact of the recommended amendments to the Charter on existing ordinances was not within the scope of this project. Council will need to evaluate the effect of any proposed changes on existing ordinances and determine a timeline to implement legislation necessitated by any Charter amendments. Once this timeline is established, Council will be in a position to set the effective date of any amendments being presented to the voters.