

GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL
BOARD AND COMMISSION AD HOC COMMITTEE
April 25, 2023
3:00 p.m.
County Square – Suite 2400 – Conference Room

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted online and on the bulletin board at County Square and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Committee Members Present:

Liz Seman, *Chairwoman*
Joey Russo
Chris Harrison
Rick Bradley

Committee Members Absent:

None

Others Present:

Dean Campbell, *Deputy County Attorney*
Regina McCaskill, *Clerk to Council*
Jessica Stone, *Deputy Clerk to Council*

Call to Order:

Chairman Seman

Item (2)

Review of Policy

Councilor Seman thanked Ms. McCaskill for drafting the proposed amendments. Ms. Seman stated her areas of concern were the requirements for applicants and the appointment piece, in regards to retaining the interview process or not. She asked Ms. McCaskill if there were any additional amendments to be included in the draft version.

Ms. McCaskill stated she had included all her “wants and wishes” in the draft, which was intended to be a starting point only. She stated the current process was very cumbersome; it needed to be trimmed down in order to flow easier.

Chairman Seman stated the proposed timeframes appeared to make sense and would be helpful for applicants. Currently, individuals waited months after being appointed to actually be seated.

Councilor Harrison inquired as to why there were currently two application cycles per year as opposed to one.

Ms. McCaskill stated, historically, either vacancies were announced or appointments made at every Council meeting. Scheduling two cycles per year was an attempt to streamline that process. At one point, Council attempted a form of “speed dating” for the interview process. Applicants were given the opportunity to interview individually with each Council Member. Ms. McCaskill stated there were a number of issues with that approach; applicants showed up late, interviews ran over the allotted time, etc.

Councilor Bradley stated he had counted approximately 170 current board members.

Councilor Seman stated having two cycles per years and staggering appointments ensured entire boards were not cleared out. She stated there had been some questions regarding the security piece of the application process.

Ms. McCaskill stated she had spoken to Councilor Mitchell about applicants being asked to provide date of birth, social security numbers, and other identifying information. Currently, the only individuals asked to provide their social security number were those applying for the Sheriff's Office Citizen Advisory Committee, at the request of Sheriff Lewis. Appointees to that board were subject to a background check. Ms. McCaskill stated an applicant's date of birth was needed in order to do a voter registration search.

Councilor Harrison stated he was not opposed to a background check for all appointees, not necessarily all applicants.

Councilor Russo stated an individual's name and date of birth were needed for the CAD System at the Sheriff's Office. That system only provided information for Greenville County, not the entire state.

Mr. Campbell stated SLED charged approximately \$25 per person for a background check; it would be expensive to run checks on all applicants. In the past, he had inquired about a discounted rate for the County and had been informed it was not possible.

Ms. McCaskill stated background checks were required for appointees to boards that fell under the jurisdiction of the Governor's Office. It could take months for that office to finalize appointments to its boards. In an effort to speed up those appointments, the Council Office had paid for those checks in the past. However, it did not speed up the process and the Council Office stopped paying for them.

Councilor Seman stated a "soft check" through the CAD System may dissuade some people from applying.

Councilor Harrison stated he thought it was a good idea to run a check, prior to an individual being appointed to a board or commission. Mr. Harrison stated the County should require some type of background check, given the fact that both the Sheriff's Office and the Governor's Office required them for their boards.

Councilor Seman stated applicants would have to agree to have one conducted.

Ms. McCaskill stated she had included consent for a background and/or credit check on the sample applications. A background check for one applicant revealed a DUI when the person was in college; he was 55 years old when he applied. Not all youthful indiscretions should preclude an individual's opportunity to serve. She suggested including the consent release on the online version of the application as a pop-up, requiring the applicant to address it.

Councilor Harrison stated including the consent on the application may raise the quality of applicants.

Ms. Stone inquired about including a disclaimer indicating an applicant may be disqualified to serve if they did not consent to a background check.

Mr. Campbell stated that would be implied if a consent authorization was included on the application.

Councilor Seman stated she felt applicants should be required to have attended at least one meeting of the board to which they applied. She asked about a past requirement involving Council Members notating whether or not they had met with individuals from their district regarding their interest in serving.

Ms. McCaskill confirmed that was a requirement in the past, prior to electronic applications.

Councilor Seman suggested including that item on the application. She stated that she felt most individuals wishing to serve on a board would reach out to their Council representative. There had been a couple of instances where a citizen from her district had applied for a board and she had no idea who they were.

Councilor Harrison asked if a citizen could serve on two boards simultaneously. He was aware of someone who currently served on the Sheriff's Office Citizen Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission.

Ms. McCaskill stated the Sheriff's Office Citizen Advisory Committee did not fall under the same classification as the regular boards and commissions. It was created for the Sheriff's Office, at the behest of some citizens. It was advisory only, with no dual office restrictions.

Councilor Seman asked if board members were required to attend some type of training, such as general governance training.

Ms. McCaskill stated the Clerk's Office had created a handbook for new board members. The handbook contained information regarding board rosters, ethics, FOIA, etc. Prior to Covid, new board members were invited to attend orientation; board liaisons were also invited to provide additional information.

Councilor Harrison stated the Communications and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee had tasked Joe Kernell and Nicole Wood with the development and implementation of a Citizen University. It would be similar to Leadership Greenville.

Councilor Seman stated anything that could be done upfront to prevent lawsuits on the backend would be good. She stated the orientation appeared to be something that should be resurrected in an effort to provide training.

Ms. McCaskill stated the orientation hit on topics that applied to all boards; however, some boards had more stringent requirements and expectations which were not part of the orientation.

Councilor Harrison inquired about training hours for Planning Commission members.

Ms. McCaskill stated they were required to attend a specified number of training hours; the Council Office maintained those records.

Ms. McCaskill stated most board liaisons had a very good relationship with the Clerk's Office and were willing to ask questions about board activities. Most board liaisons attended the orientation sessions.

Councilor Seman stated she would like to make new board member orientation a requirement.

Councilor Bradley stated he had attended Council Meetings prior to being elected in order to get a better understanding of what was involved.

Councilor Harrison stated he felt it was important to determine qualifiers for each board. For example, one engineer, one planner, and no more than four licensed real estate agents for the Planning Commission. Mr. Harrison stated he would not want to place specific qualifications on all board seats; however, creating minimums and maximums would be helpful.

Councilor Harrison inquired about the possibility of adding qualifiers to the enabling ordinance of each board. Some boards already had qualifiers in place.

Mr. Campbell stated it was difficult to get enough applicants for some boards, such as the Construction Board of Appeals. The qualifiers for that board were very specific. Some boards were considering accepting applications from individuals that may not possess the required attributes. There were no qualifiers for the Planning Commission. Mr. Campbell stated he would have to research the issue of adding qualifiers to the enabling ordinances.

Ms. McCaskill gave an example of language that was included in the enabling legislation for 12-member boards, stating, "in so far as possible, one member would be appointed from each district." Council was not bound to fill seats in that manner and, it kept otherwise vacant seats to be filled if there were no applicants from a particular district. She also stated Council did adopt Ordinance #784 which covered several boards with changes, without having to amend each and every board's enabling legislation.

Councilor Harrison stated he was concerned about board member qualifications to serve on a board.

Mr. Campbell stated one ordinance could address potential qualifiers for a number of boards.

Councilor Harrison volunteered to work on an ordinance regarding specific qualifiers for specific boards.

Ms. McCaskill stated if a revised policy was adopted in time for the next cycle, it would apply to those individuals submitting applications in September.

Councilor Russo stated he had concerns about being too specific in regards to qualifiers. He wanted "average" citizens to have the opportunity to serve on boards about which they were passionate. Mr. Russo stated some people were concerned about certain boards; for example, there was currently no librarian serving on the Library Board. Mr. Russo stated he would gladly welcome a librarian to serve on that board; however, he did not feel it was Council's responsibility to dictate stringent requirements for board members.

Councilor Harrison suggested requiring at least one former librarian and one former teacher for the Library Board.

Councilor Bradley stated he had reviewed the boards that currently had specific requirements; those boards had vacancies, as it was difficult to fill those positions.

Councilor Harrison stated if major changes were not made, Council would continue to face the same issues.

Councilor Seman asked Mr. Harrison to review the boards for specific qualifiers, draft a proposed ordinance, and report back to the committee for review.

Councilor Russo stated the Library Board recently had one vacancy. He could not recall one former librarian in all the applications that were received.

Councilor Seman stated it may be beneficial to have an accountant or an attorney to serve on that board.

Ms. McCaskill stated it was important to look at the Library Board's purpose. The board was tasked with electing an Executive Director who was responsible for managing personnel. Staff members did not have direct access to the board.

Mr. Campbell stated the Library Board's most recent issue was a policy to dictate where certain books should be placed in the library, as promulgated by the board. Staff was looking to the board to develop a policy and provide direction.

Councilor Harrison suggested setting maximum qualifiers for some boards, such as the Planning Commission. For example, setting a maximum on the number of licensed real estate agents to serve on that board.

Councilor Seman stated it appeared that most Council Members were in favor of the Committee of the Whole handling the review of applications and appointment process for all boards and commissions. She expressed concerns regarding eliminating the interview process. Ms. Seman stated, in her opinion, it may be difficult to appoint the best people without talking to them face-to-face.

Councilor Bradley stated it was hard to hire an individual for a job without meeting with them face-to-face.

Councilor Harrison stated he had concerns about applicants who did not show up for the interview process. While it should not exclude them from the board, it told him a lot about individuals who did not show up. Mr. Harrison stated he would venture to guess that the board members with attendance issues probably did not show up for the interview process.

Councilor Seman stated the "speed dating" option for the interview process did not appear to be a bad idea. She suggested handling it like job interviews. When dealing with a large number of applicants for a small number of vacancies, it could be helpful to narrow the list of applicants down and interview only those selected individuals. Ms. Seman inquired as to how Council would actually narrow the list of candidates.

Ms. McCaskill stated she had included additional questions on the proposed applications, based on those questions Council Members had asked during previous interviews. She suggested including questions that would reveal what Council really wanted to know about a person in order to determine the best applicants. Failure to answer a question appropriately or to check a box could certainly aid the elimination process.

Councilor Bradley stated that, currently, all applicants were given the opportunity to be interviewed. He inquired about the time involved in whittling down the number of applicants to be interviewed as opposed to interviewing them all.

Councilor Seman stated that in her opinion, interviewing all applicants during Committee of the Whole meetings would be daunting. It was difficult to interview more than 15 applicants in one hour.

Councilor Russo stated it was very time consuming for the RIPW Committee to interview all the applicants for the Library Board; there were more than 20 individuals who applied. He suggested Council have questions prepared for the applicants as they rarely asked questions. Mr. Russo stated one applicant told him that he did not know what to say during the interview process.

Councilor Bradley stated as a businessman, he would not interview all the job applications he received. He would pick out those applicants that appeared to possess the qualifications he was looking for. Mr. Bradley stated Council should be able to do something similar based on the application responses.

Councilor Harrison stated most Council Members knew which candidates they would be voting for, prior to the interviews. He would like to be able to regulate that a bit.

Ms. McCaskill stated it had been suggested applicants submit a short video indicating what they would say in an interview. She had not checked with the IT Department to see if that was possible.

Councilor Russo suggested making the video an option as he felt only a few individuals would do so.

Councilor Harrison stated voting the same night as conducting interviews appeared to be rushing the process. It was almost as if Council Members had to know which candidates they were going to vote for prior to the interviews. Mr. Harrison stated the “speed dating” process appeared to have some merit.

Ms. Stone suggested putting Council Members in small groups of 3 or 4 to speed up the interview process. Each candidate would interview with small groups as opposed to each Council Members separately.

Councilor Russo stated applicants would be more relaxed in some type of “speed dating” setting and Council Members could possibly be more apt to ask questions.

Councilor Harrison inquired about the interview process for the other larger counties.

Ms. McCaskill stated she would reach out to those counties and inquire. She suggested a “meet and greet” to give candidates and Council Members the opportunity to talk on an informal basis. A series of “meet and greet” events could be scheduled throughout the month.

Ms. Stone stated scheduling multiple “meet and greet” events would give most applicants the opportunity to speak with Council.

Councilor Seman stated the events would be informal and not required; however, she would more than likely give more credence to those applicants who showed up. She stressed that applicants should attend board meetings, prior to applying, and reach out to their district representative.

Ms. Stone suggested a checklist for each applicant. For example, notating on the list if the applicant had attended board meetings, reached out to their representative, etc.

Mr. Campbell stated some incumbents had expressed to him that they thought the interview process was optional and did not attend. Those individuals were surprised when they were not put back on a board.

Ms. McCaskill stated in her invite letter, she informed applicants that the interview process was optional, but, heavy consideration would be given to those who participated. Ms. McCaskill stated most applicants contacted her if they were unable to attend. She encouraged them to submit their comments in writing to the Council office and staff would disseminate them.

Mr. Campbell stated the current policy’s language was confusing and gave the impression that applicants did not have to participate in the interview process.

Councilor Seman asked if a Council Member could request a reconsideration if the entire process was handled by the Committee of Whole.

Ms. McCaskill stated any item could be reconsidered based on Council Rules.

Mr. Campbell stated after appointees were announced, any Council Member could request a reconsideration if they were on the prevailing side.

Councilor Seman stated she would prefer to review feedback from other counties prior to making a decision regarding the interview process. She was in favor of the “meet and greet” idea.

Ms. McCaskill asked if the “meet and greet” events should include boards with fewer applicants than actual vacancies.

Councilor Seman stated she felt it should include all applicants, regardless of the number of applications and the number of vacancies. There may be some situations in which the only applicant was really not a good fit for the board.

Councilor Bradley stated he had reviewed some of the applications after the appointments were made. He had concerns about some of them.

Councilor Seman stated she had done the same thing and had concerns that some people did not interview well but looked very good on paper.

Councilor Russo asked if there was an option to attach resumes or other information to applications.

Councilor Seman asked if a full social media scan would be helpful.

Councilor Russo stated he had looked at some applicants’ Facebook profiles. He did the same thing when hiring people.

Councilor Seman suggested adding a social media profile request on the application.

Councilor Seman stated the committee needed to spend time on the attendance and removal process part of the policy. In the past, Council went through a process to define “excessive absences” as indicated in the current policy.

Councilor Harrison inquired about any consequences for board members whose attendance violated the current policy.

Ms. McCaskill stated in the past, either the Chairperson or Staff liaison for a board would contact the Council Office to request removal of a board member due to excessive absences. The Committee of the Whole would then take action. Council had the option of taking action based on the Attendance Report, with no input from the Chairperson or Staff liaison. All board members were given a Board and Commission handbook that included the current policy. Prior to COVID, when the Council office held new board member orientation, attendance was stressed. Ms. McCaskill stated she sent each appointee a confirmation letter which stressed the importance of attendance.

Councilor Harrison stated he would like to see automatic removals of those individuals violating the policy. In some circumstances, the Chairperson could submit a request to not remove an individual.

Ms. McCaskill stated the Council office could send a letter to the Chairperson or Staff liaison advising them an individual was in violation of the policy. If the board wanted to retain the member in question, they must submit a written request to do so to the Council office by a specified date. Failure to contact the Council office would result in immediate removal. Most board liaisons were very good at submitting their attendance reports on a quarterly basis.

Councilor Seman suggested the Committee of the Whole review of the attendance report on quarterly basis.

Councilor Harrison stated he was in favor of looking at attendance on a yearly basis. After the second quarter, letters would be sent to all board members who were in jeopardy of violating the policy.

Ms. McCaskill stated some boards only met once or twice a year. If a board member missed one of two meetings, they would be in jeopardy of violating the policy. It may be beneficial to allow the Chairperson of each board to look at violations on a case by case basis as there may be a valid reason the member was unable to attend.

Councilor Seman suggested adding verbiage to the policy to indicate attendance would be reviewed by Council on a quarterly basis and the Clerk's Office would send letters to possible violators each quarter. If added, Council would have the ability to remove board members.

Ms. McCaskill asked the committee members to develop a list of questions for the interview process as well as the applications.

Councilor Harrison suggested developing a way to notify individuals not selected to be on a board of other vacancies.

Ms. McCaskill stated at the end of each application cycle, she contacted each person not elected to a board and informed them that their application would be held for six (6) months in case there was a vacancy. At that point, it would be too late for them to apply to another board.

Councilor Harrison stated he would like for applicants to be informed about other vacancies; he asked if there was a way to do that.

Ms. McCaskill stated throughout the board cycle, people contacted her wanting more information about serving. Those individuals were not necessarily looking for specific boards; they just wanted to be part of the community. She would direct them to those boards with very few, if any, applications and open seats. She stated that she felt notification of board vacancies was lacking; there was no current public acknowledgement about them. That information could also be relayed during Council meetings. Ms. McCaskill stated it needed to be made more public.

Councilor Harrison inquired if Bob Mihalic, Governmental Affairs Officer, posted information regarding board vacancies on social media.

Ms. McCaskill stated there was a blurb on the County's webpage; however, she was unaware if anything had been posted on the County's social media pages.

Councilor Russo stated an active social media campaign was needed for board vacancies.

Councilor Harrison stated staff was working on a Greenville County app; information regarding boards and commissions could be included on it. Mr. Harrison stated other social media platforms should be utilized to get information out about the County's boards and commissions.

Councilor Seman inquired about the deadline to submit the proposed changes to Council.

Ms. McCaskill stated the expected deadline was June 6. The next application cycle would typically start July 1. If the policy passed then the start time would be September 1, which would allow plenty of time to make any necessary changes. The deadline may have to be extended if new programs requiring input from the IT Department were added to the policy. She asked the IT Department to refresh the board and commission page on the County's website. It was currently very antiquated as it was more than 20 years old. Ms. McCaskill stated she had compared MatchBoard with the County's board and commission site; MatchBoard was more attractive but the County's site contained the same information.

Councilor Harrison stated the County's webpage was slated to be upgraded, along with the logo and other items related to Greenville County.

Councilor Bradley asked if the proposed “meet and greet” would take the place of the interviews.

Councilor Seman stated it would.

Councilor Russo asked if the “meet and greet” could be used to whittle down the list of candidates.

Councilor Seman stated Council Members should have read the applications prior to the “meet and greet.” They would meet the candidates and then proceed to vote in Committee of the Whole. She suggested discussing applicants in an executive session as opposed to on the floor.

Ms. McCaskill stated boards and commissions fell under personnel matters and could be dealt with in executive session.

Councilor Harrison stated he felt more substantive conversation would occur during executive session.

Ms. McCaskill suggested having the executive session at one meeting and voting on the candidates at the next. The public’s perception of the process was important.

Councilor Harrison stated it may be best to schedule the “meet and greet” events and executive session on the same day; voting for the candidates would occur at the next scheduled Committee of the Whole meeting.

Councilor Bradley asked if incumbents were required to complete an application if they reapplied to be on a board.

Ms. McCaskill stated they were required to complete a new application each time they reapplied.

Mr. Campbell inquired about the addition of the requirement that stated, “Applicants shall not be a party to an active legal action against the County.” He stated an individual may become involved in legal action against the County by no fault of their own. He cited two examples:

- 1) An automobile accident involving a citizen and a Greenville County vehicle
- 2) A citizen wanting to close a County road files an adverse action against the County

Mr. Campbell suggesting including a question on the application related to that issue for Council’s review as opposed to listing it as a disqualifier.

Item (3) Adjournment

Action: Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 4:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Jessica M. Stone
Deputy Clerk to Council