

October, 2015

A MONTHLY MESSAGE  
FROM



**MAYOR  
TODD GOTTEL**



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## How Amending the City Charter Can Benefit Our Community!

Recently, I've been asked to clarify why we are once again considering a City Charter revision, so this month I would like to address that subject, along with providing information on the Charter and what it means to our City. As I've mentioned in past issues, I often find myself having to clarify information on complex issues that has somehow been miscommunicated in the community, leading to confusion on the part of our citizens. We are an extremely open and transparent organization, and it's so important to me that everyone in Rowlett understands these issues, and why the City Council makes the decisions we do!

Cities in the State of Texas are classified as either General Law or Home Rule. Rowlett is a Home Rule city and, along with the state laws of Texas, is governed by a Home Rule Charter. Much like the constitution, the Charter outlines the form of government, powers of the City, rules relating to the City Council and their appointees, financial and legislative processes, and franchise regulations. As stated in the Charter, "the City Council shall appoint a charter Review commission at least once every five years." It also

states that "Amendments to this Charter may be framed and submitted to the qualified voters of the City.; but no more often than once every two years, as provided by the laws of the State." The last Charter Review Commission was appointed in 2012 and the Charter amended after an election in 2013.

Folks, amending our City Charter is not a process entered into lightly or without much forethought. Please read more about who Council appointed to the current Charter Review Commission and why, along with just what revisions are under consideration and why on the following pages. Remember, at the end of the day, whatever revisions, if any, the commission recommends will have to be approved by YOU, the registered voters in Rowlett next May!

Regards,

Mayor Todd Gottel



**National Night Out included a very special occasion this year. The park in Waterview was formally renamed and dedicated to Gladys and Al Wilkinson to celebrate their retirement from the Waterview Homeowners Association and honor their long-time service to this community.**

# City Charter Amendment Process

As I stated on page 1, our City Charter mandates that the City Council may appoint a Charter Review Commission at least once every five years, and that any amendments they recommend may be put on a ballot for Rowlett voters once every two years.

## Timeline

In the May 12, 2015, Work Session, we (the City Council) gave consensus to staff to proceed with preparation for appointing a Charter Review Commission and at the May 19 meeting, decided to move forward with a possible May 2016 election for any proposed changes. On June 16, Council appointed the following members to the Charter Review Commission:

*Whitney Laning – Chair*  
*Deb Shinder*  
*Pamela Liston*  
*Martha Brown*  
*Leisa Oleson Peebles*

*Thomas Finney*  
*Ray Kneggs*  
*Bruce Mahnken (Alternate)*  
*Dan Pence (Alternate)*

Members were very carefully vetted and invited to serve based on their previous experience as Councilmembers, board or commission members, previous experience serving on the Charter Review Commission, and previously demonstrated extraordinary service in our community.

They bring an extremely broad base of knowledge, history and dedication to doing “what is best” for Rowlett and I’m so happy to have all of their differing areas of expertise represented on this commission.

## The Charter states:

“The City Council shall determine the scope of the review by the Commission. The Commission shall determine whether the Charter requires revision or amendment. The Commission may request factual information concerning the operation of the City and such information may be provided in writing or orally. The Commission may hold public hearings regarding the Charter. The Commission shall make recommendations for changes to the Charter without any consideration of the impact upon staff or cost to the City. The Commission shall report its findings and present its recommendations regarding the Charter to the City Council at a regular or special meeting.”

At their Planning and Strategy Development meeting in July, Council confirmed proceeding with the scope as presented:

*Textual rewrite/update of the document that would be completed/overseen by the City Attorney.*

*Omission of or revisions to term limits or term durations for Councilmembers of the City of Rowlett.*

Folks, this revision is so important to the growth of our community. It’s not to further the “buddy” or “good ‘ol boy” system, as some have suggested, but it will provide continuity through a sometimes multi-year development process, among other things. When a City Councilmember is elected, it is quite a journey to learn everything there is to know, i.e. where the Council is currently in terms of strategy, development, what projects are being considered now, what projects will be under consideration in the coming years and why, etc. It’s extremely time consuming and the amount of subject matter to master a knowledge of is vast, to say the least. It is vital to the continued growth and development continuity of our community to retain knowledgeable, invested, passionate councilmembers.

Another reason to amend the current term limits is to increase the possibility of garnering grants and external project funding. Through regional partnerships and by serving on regional and statewide commissions and task forces, our City Councilmembers are able to identify many more sources of possible project funding. This is extremely difficult for our councilmembers to do currently because of the time commitment necessary to ramp up and “learn it all”, it is really only possible after a councilmember has served several years. We need to extend these term limits to help keep that institutional knowledge and expertise ON the City Council, not usher it out the door!

***Determination of appropriate compensation for Councilmembers of the City of Rowlett.***

As I'm sure you already know, serving on the City Council is not the way these folks make their living, it is basically a volunteer position. Your councilmembers all share a passion for public service and our community. They all have families and careers, which they juggle with grace on a daily basis in order to meet all of the demands placed on them by serving in this capacity. But as our community grows and the development we have

all wanted so long for increases, so do the demands on our councilmembers. So folks, realistically in order for us to attract the best and brightest new members, and hang on to those who are already serving (again, keep that institutional knowledge and expertise ON the City Council), we feel the need to consider how they are compensated for the hours and hours and hours and hours that we as a community expect them to serve each month.

***Prohibition of alcohol sales in residential zoning/neighborhoods.***

***Review of Section 3.08 (I) with regard to automatic resignation upon declaring candidacy for another seat.***

We really run the risk of losing excellent councilmembers by expecting them to resign from the City Council just to run for Mayor. This current requirement, I feel, also may discourage an extremely qualified councilmember

from even running because they may not want to take the chance that, should they lose, they won't be allowed to serve out their term on the Council.



***Progress and What's Next?***

***When the Commission first met in September, they split up into three sub-committees to review the Charter.***

- Council and Charter***
- Government and Officers***
- Financial and Legal***

Each sub-committee reviewed the Articles related to their subject matter, keeping in mind the scope as set forth by the Council. The Commission has been diligently working toward recommendations that they will present to us, the City Council, by the end of the year. At that time, Council will consider their recommendations and then will decide one or some of the following:

***Order a Special Election for Saturday, May 14, putting forth some or all of the Commission's recommendations;***

- 1 Submit Council recommendations for inclusion in a Special Election,***
- 2 Opt for no Special Election at this time.***

We'll be providing lots more information and progress updates after the first of the year, so stay tuned in to the City's newsletter, RTN16 and of course, my Monthly Message.

***Visit [www.Rowlett.com/CharterReview](http://www.Rowlett.com/CharterReview) for more information, meeting dates and agendas.***

***By reviewing the Charter, it helps to ensure that it stays pertinent to where we are as a City and the direction we, as residents of Rowlett, want to go. It is a changing document that can grow with us as we continue to be ...**On the Move!*****