**NEW COLUMBIA STATEHOOD COMMISSION**

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

June 28, 2016

John A. Wilson Building

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room G-9

**Members of the Commission**

* Mayor Muriel Bowser
* Council Chairman Phil Mendelson
* Senator Paul Strauss
* Senator Michael D. Brown
* Representative Franklin Garcia
* Mayor Muriel Bowser opened the meeting at 6:53 PM.
* Senator Strauss stated that he had concerns about the accelerated process but his concerns had been abated with the level of input from the community. He thanked the Mayor and Chairman Mendelson for their leadership.
* Senator Brown in his opening statement shared that he read all four Constitutions and this one was by far the most Democratic.
* Representative Garcia stated that the voters will have an opportunity to say whether DC will be a state and then it will be up to the 115th Congress to decide if DC should be the 51st state.
* Mayor Bowser reviewed the documents under discussion including the Commission report, updated draft Constitution, and public comment log.
* Professor Morrison discussed the question of expanding the Constitution. He laid out considerations in additional rights under the Bill of Rights. The question is whether expansion of rights should be included in this version of the Constitution, it’s not whether we should have rights.
* The Mayor asked for a vote to support the Bill of Rights.
* The Commission discussed the right to a speedy trial, witnesses, assistance of counsel (Article 6) in the Constitution. Senator Strauss offered an amendment to strike the 180 days language from Article 6. After debate, Senator Strauss withdrew the amendment.
* Senator Brown offered an amendment that would expand the Constitution to include the right to an education, right to vote, and provision on LGBT rights.
* Mayor Muriel Bowser remarked that she supported the expansion of rights but not at this time. She emphasized the importance of sticking with the current Constitutional draft.
* Chairman Mendelson weighed in on the proposed education expansion under the Bill of Rights. He said that this should be left to the legislature.
* Senator Strauss articulated that the goal is to come up with a structure and include aspirational goals.
* A motion to vote on the expanded rights amendment was moved. The amendment failed.
* The composition of the legislature (Article I) of the Constitution was debated. Many of the public comments on draft Constitution questioned the size of the state legislature. The draft Constitution calls for 13 members in the House of Delegates comprised of 4 At-Large Members, one At-Large Speaker, and 8 members elected by voters from each legislative district.
* Senator Brown expressed concerns about size of the state legislature and stated that it is too small in the current draft. He suggested that it should also be bi-cameral not unicameral. Both Wyoming and Vermont have smaller populations and have larger House of Delegates. There are 90 members in Wyoming’s legislature. Nebraska is the only state with a unicameral, non-partisan state legislature.
* Senator Strauss recommended that the House of Delegates be at least 25 members.
* The Mayor shared that the size of the state legislature was among the top two comments received from the public. She agreed that we need more democracy and opportunities to develop political talent. She is also mindful of growing the government but at the right size.
* The Mayor offered a motion to amend the size of the state legislature to be increased from 13 members to 21 members. It would include 2 voting members from each district, 4 At-Large members and a Speaker.
* Chairman Mendelson stated that the system of checks and balances is critical. He is unclear where the Council stands on the size of the state legislature.
* Senator Brown stated that he supported a 25 person legislature to accommodate the population of D.C.
* An amendment was offered to increase the size of the state legislature to 21 members and the amendment passed.
* The Commission discussed Article II, the Executive Branch in the Draft Constitution.
* Senator Brown questioned Section 7 under Article II, dealing with the State Board of Education. He stated that it should not be an advisory board but should be an elected Board.
* Senator Strauss noted that the draft does call for an elected State Board of Education.
* No changes were made to the State Board of education section of the Draft Constitution.
* The Mayor moved to Judicial Branch, Article III in the Draft Constitution. Flexibility to add intermediate courts has been added (not a pre-requisite). There is opportunity to reappoint or remove.
* The Commission did not amend the Budget and Financial Management Article (Article IV) or Borrowing (Article V) of the Draft Constitution.
* The Commission discussed the Initiative, Referendum and Recall Article (Article VI) in the Draft Constitution. Cannot have a referendum to repeal anti-discriminatory laws. This section was revised to say that to initiate a referendum it will take 5 percent of the registered voters from the the entire state, provided that the total signatures include 5 percent of voters in a majority of the legislative districts. The second portion of the requirement was previously 5 percent of the registered voters in each of 5 or more legislative districts.
* The Commission deliberated on the Miscellaneous article (Article VII). There was discussion about the two-thirds vote needed to amend the Constitution. The initial draft stated that the Constitution would require a simple majority vote.
* There was no motion to change Article VII.
* Senator Brown offered a motion to add a code of ethics to this section
* The Constitution was amended to include a 5 year constitutional convention convening. The new language would call for a Convention at the five year anniversary of Admission. The House of Delegates would record a vote on whether to hold a Constitutional Convention and under what rules; the election process for delegates, if any; and on which subjects, if the subjects are to be limited.
* The Commission discussed the Transfer of Offices (Article VIII) of the Draft Constitution. Senator Brown stated he would like to insert the Transfer of Offices from the 1982 Constitution. The provision would have the shadow delegation act as the Senators and Representative until their replacements are elected. Continued discussion centered on whether or not the shadow delegates would automatically become the Congressional delegation once DC became a state. Chairman Mendelson questioned how other states treated this process upon approving statehood and if these seats should be treated as vacant seats. He also asked what would happen to Congresswoman Norton with such a provision.
* Professor Aderson Francois posited that making these changes were policy vs. constitutional in nature. Once the New Columbia Admissions Act passes, the Delegate position no longer exists.
* MMB was offended by the conversation.
* Fred Cooke clarified that the Constitution defines the state and who represents the state. Congress as a body can do what it wants. Inserting this language will not accomplish the objective.
* Filling vacancies in federal offices was reviewed.
* Upon a vote, the amendment passed 3-2.
* Beverly Perry, Senior Advisor to Mayor Bowser shared that 150 public comments were received. Most submitted comments were about the future state name.
* Senator Brown supported the name New Columbia. He stated that Columbia carries a negative meaning because many believe it is derived from Columbus when it really derives from a Goddess.
* The Commission voted and unanimously approved the new state name as New Columbia.
* The Mayor asked the Commission to vote on the Commission report, updated draft Constitution and Map to be forwarded to the D.C. Council. The Commission unanimously approved.
* Phil Mendelson updated the Commission on the latest activity on DC statehood in the DC Council. He shared that Council is prepared to receive the resolution and advisory referendum on July 12.
* Mayor Bowser adjourned the meeting at 9:26 pm.