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Minutes of the January 20, 1989 Meeting of the New York City Charter Revision Commission

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M I N U T E S

January 20, 1989 Meeting

The New York City Charter Revision Commission

Present: Commissioners Schwarz, Leventhal, Molloy, Richland, Friendly, Trager, Gourdine, Betanzos, and Gribetz. Murray and Paredes were present for part of the meeting.

Absent: Sullivan, Michel, Alvarez, and Murphy.

Summary of Major Points

Schwarz greeted the Commission and described a short term work plan for the next six weeks, which includes fact-finding hearings to be held between February 28 and April 4. The hearings would be organized by subject areas--examining actions that government takes, such as land use, budgeting, and contracting, and examining how governments work, such as oversight and local-central tensions. He said that the Commission does not want to decide now whether to make ballot recommendations this year. However, he felt that to do nothing until the Supreme Court issues a decision would tie the Commission's hands as far as options.

Leventhal asked what would be done with the previous Commission's preliminary recommendations. Schwarz said that they would eventually be considered as options.

Lane described the workplan of the Commission staff and the preparation for the hearings in more detail. He mentioned that a number of the previous Commission's reports are being prepared for publication.

Friendly felt that the Commission needs to hear more about the process by which city government works and urged the use of actual cases.

Trager felt that there were certain facts the Commission might not be able to obtain in public hearings. Schwarz said he recognized that and believed that the Commission had the legal power to hold private hearings. However, he felt, such hearings should be limited to very specific situations in which the witness would be subject to some harm if the testimony was given publicly. He felt that present elected officials should not be permitted to testify privately and that some form of anonymous public record be maintained.

Molloy expressed support for the case study approach.

Leventhal felt the area where the previous Commission, as a group, could have used the most extra information and knowledge was land use.

Trager felt there needed to be more attention to Community Boards, local voice, local involvement; or said another way, how to make local government a mechanism for empowerment without paralyzing the city.

In response to a question from Betanzos, Lane said that a

record has been kept of all the issues the previous Commission said it would examine. Mauro mentioned some of the specific topics which the Commission could still examine: personnel issues, counsels for independently elected officials, the role of the Inspector General, public construction, and campaign finance reform.

Gribetz felt that the Commission should devote some resources to how the approved Charter revisions are being implemented.

Schwarz said that the Commission needs to address at some point whether the Charter should be a constitution rather than a code.

In response to a comment by Friendly, Schwarz said the staff would find a way to capsulize the information from the hearings for those who Commissioners who cannot attend them.

Upon a motion by Trager and a second by Gribetz, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn. The next Commission meeting was set for February 16.