



Ralph S. Northam
Governor

R. Brian Ball
Secretary of
Commerce and Trade

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Erik C. Johnston
Director

DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Commission on Local Government Public Hearing September 8, 2021 7:00 P.M. Martinsville, Virginia

Members Present

R. Michael Amyx (attending virtually)
Stephanie Davis, PhD, Chair
Ceasor T. Johnson, D.Min.
Diane M. Linderman, PE, Vice Chair
Rosemary M. Mahan

Members Absent

Call to Order

The Commission on Local Government (CLG) Chair, Dr. Stephanie Davis, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. David Conmy, Local Government Administrator at the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) initiated a roll call vote. Mr. Conmy informed Chair Davis that a quorum was present.

Mr. Amyx attended the meeting virtually via Google meets from 11850 Aberdeen Landing Terrace, Midlothian, Virginia, 23113 due to a medical condition that prevented his physical attendance.

Public Comment

Dr. Davis announced that the purpose of the public hearing is to review a proposed Voluntary Settlement Agreement between the City of Martinsville and Henry County providing for the reversion of Martinsville from city to town status within Henry County, including the allocation of governmental services following that change.

Dr. Davis recognized Mr. Conmy to provide an overview of the process set out in the Code of Virginia guiding the Commission's review of the proposed Voluntary Settlement Agreement.

Dr. Davis provided an overview of the procedures for offering public comment and recognized Mr. Cody Anderson, Policy Analyst at DHCD, to call the speakers.

Gene Teague, former Mayor and City Council Member for the City of Martinsville, spoke to the necessity of reversion due to Martinsville's relative fiscal stress and suggested a reversion date of July 1, 2022.

Andrew Palmer suggested consolidation as opposed to reversion and, in the alternative, a reversion date of July 1, 2024.

Eric Phillips spoke against reversion and noted the lack of mutuality and transparency in the reversion process.

Mary Martin, former Henry County School Board member, spoke against reversion, noted potential problems with the dissolution of the Martinsville City School Board, and, in the alternative, suggested a reversion date of July 1, 2024.

Zebedee Talley, Superintendent of Martinsville City Public Schools, provided information about the state of Martinsville City schools and their involvement in the reversion process.

Donna Dillard, Chair of the Martinsville City School Board, suggested that the Virginia Board of Education must be involved in the dissolution of Martinsville City Public Schools, advocated for a later reversion date, and provided information about the School Board's involvement in the reversion process.

Kelvin Perry spoke against reversion and noted the lack of transparency and citizen engagement in the reversion process. Mr. Perry suggested the creation of citizen commissions to guide reversion and changes to the school systems.

Tyler Millner spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process. Mr. Milner also suggested the creation of citizen commissions to guide reversion and changes to the school systems.

Barry Green, former Mayor and City Council Member for the City of Martinsville spoke for reversion as a way to efficiently provide services to citizens.

Naomi Hodge-Muse, President of the Martinsville-Henry County NAACP, spoke to the need to protect minority voters when reversion happens, and suggested that the Voluntary Settlement Agreement, as written, has the potential to dilute minority voting power.

John Sims spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process and the need to publicly examine fiscal policies and budgets.

Donald Kirby spoke against reversion and noted how the lack of citizen engagement has led to confusion among citizens.

Debra Buchanan, Vice Chair of the Henry County Board of Supervisors, spoke in favor of the Voluntary Settlement Agreement, but noted the lack of citizen input, which she stated was caused by various state laws that do not allow for citizen input.

Ashby Pritchett, Clerk of Martinsville City Circuit Court, suggested that the terms of the Voluntary Settlement Agreement, specifically the dissolution of the Martinsville City Schools, are an ultra vires action that would violate the Dillon Rule.

J.C. Richardson spoke against the reversion, noted the lack of citizen input, and outlined various state laws that do not allow for citizen input. Mr. Richardson recommended the creation of citizen commissions to guide the reversion process.

Heath Sabin brought forward concerns about the potential geographic representation of the three judge panel and suggested a later reversion date to include more public input.

Don Williams spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process.

Ruth Easley, Commissioner of Revenue for the City of Martinsville, spoke against reversion and suggested that the Voluntary Settlement Agreement violates Code of Virginia § 15.2-1600(B), open meetings laws, and the Personal Property Tax Relief Act, and that the financial data presented to the Commission was inaccurate. She further stated that it would take more than a year to migrate financial data from the City to the County upon reversion.

Ray Reynolds spoke against reversion and noted the potential negative effect of the reversion on Martinsville City Schools and, in the alternative, suggested a reversion date of July 1, 2024.

Leroy Hairston spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process.

Tammy Pearson, Member of Martinsville City Council, spoke against the Voluntary Settlement Agreement and noted the lack of engagement of minority citizens and the Martinsville School Board in the reversion process.

Joe Bryant, Henry Counter Supervisor, noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process and suggested a July 1, 2024 reversion date.

Teddy Martin, Member of the Henry County School Board, spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen and school board engagement in the reversion process.

Lane Perry, Henry County Sheriff, spoke to the conditions and needs of the jails and the Sheriff's Office in the County and how

they would be impacted by reversion. He suggested a delayed reversion date.

Steve Eanes, Henry County Chief Deputy Sheriff, spoke to the needs of inmates in Henry County and how they would be impacted by reversion. He recommended sharing the costs of building new facilities between the City and the Town and a reversion date of July 1, 2024.

Jennifer Bowles, Member of the Martinsville City Council and Vice Mayor, spoke in favor of reversion and recounted some of the anti-reversion comments she had heard from the citizens of the City.

Doug Bynum spoke against reversion and noted the negative impact of reversion on citizens with fixed incomes, the potential dilution of political representation, and the lack of citizen input.

Matthew Brown noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process. He suggested that students should also be involved in the reversion process.

James Cartier spoke against reversion in its current form, and suggested that multiple commissions of stakeholders be convened to discuss reversion if it is to go forward.

Charles Roark spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen involvement in the reversion process and the overwhelming opposition to reversion that he has noticed as a news station owner.

Sharmain Thornton spoke against reversion and noted the lack of citizen engagement in the reversion process, especially concerning changes to the school districts.

Ernest Ethan spoke against reversion and noted that few citizens are happy with reversion or the reversion process.

Garrett Dillard encouraged citizens of both the City and the County to cooperate to solve problems in their community regardless of whether reversion takes place.

Mr. Anderson offered an additional opportunity for further comments from those attending the proceedings virtually.

Dr. Davis noted that the record will remain open for additional written comments through 5:00 pm, September 17, 2021.

Recess

Ms. Linderman moved that the Commission stand in recess until 9:00 am on September 9. The motion was seconded by Ms. Mahan. The motion passed.