

**BELLE MEADE STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT:  
SHOULD BELLE MEADE CONSIDER FIVE COMMISSIONERS?**

For a number of years, the question has been raised by Belle Meade Commissioners and residents whether the City of Belle Meade might benefit from a five-member Commission in place of the three-member Commission under which we currently operate. This question has been studied recently by a six person committee composed of: Charlotte Atwood, Bob Coleman, Robert McNeilly, Peggy Warner, Al Whitson, and Emily Zerfoss. The committee met October 3, October 17, and December 5, 2007 with excellent attendance and with City Manager Beth Reardon present at all meetings.

At our first meeting, Beth Reardon provided copies of the Charter of the City of Belle Meade, Section 6-20-101 (c), (d), which allows the option of increasing to five Commissioners; however, a change from the current three Commissioners to five would require an amendment by ordinance. This amendment would require adoption by the Commissioners and then must be approved by a majority of Belle Meade residents. The vote could occur in the November 2008 election.

Belle Meade operates under a Commissioner/City Manager structure. The study committee initiated deliberations with a discussion of the history of roles of Commissioners and City Managers. The Commissioners have full responsibility for policy making and planning. To make certain Belle Meade has adequate funds for city operations, Commissioners have a fiscal responsibility to monitor the City's financial resources, monthly revenues and expenditures. The Commissioners appoint the City Manager whose responsibility is daily administration of Belle Meade. They also appoint members to the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Municipal Planning Commission and the Board of Building Code Appeals, all of which are required boards under the City Charter. Very active Citizen Committees serve as valuable advisors to the Commissioners and the Mayor, especially in areas of finance, beautification, and planning. The recent completion of Belle Meade's new City Hall under budget is the result of close co-operation between the Commissioners, the administration, and citizen advisory committees. Several study committee members commented that some residents may be unaware of these distinct roles played in Belle Meade resulting in a successful

Commissioner/City Manager municipality. More newsletter information and other communication to the residents could remedy this.

At our first meeting, Beth Reardon provided data from similar sized Tennessee municipalities. Belle Meade with three commissioners who represent approximately 3,000 residents is the exception. Other cities of our size have five to seven Commissioners; however, these cities possibly have different compositions and issues. Because we felt it significant to hear from former commissioners, committee members sought their thoughts about the possibility of an expanded commission. Also, each study committee member sought opinions from a cross section of residents. Finally, the committee requested Beth Reardon pose the question of a five-person Commission to Belle Meade residents in the newsletter. Responses from these informal interviews were wide ranging and are reflected in the analysis that follows.

In conclusion, our committee recognizes the following positive and negative reasons for a five person commission in Belle Meade:

## **PROS**

- I. Expansion provides for more citizen participation (possibly leading to better informed citizens).
- II. Five commissioners lends added expertise to the board with additional ideas and talents to address city issues.
- III. Five persons provide more accessibility for residents (should make it possible for more constituencies to be heard).
- IV. When one commissioner is not able to attend meetings, city business could be transacted.
- V. More residents might be willing to serve on a commission of five rather than three, thereby sharing the responsibilities.
- VI. A 'single issue' candidate has less clout as one of five.
- VII. Belle Meade citizens should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue.

## **CONS**

- I. A person who is one of five instead of three might view his or her responsibilities as less significant.

- II. A five member Commission might be difficult to fill (not enough citizens willing to serve).
- III. There is a possibility of a “single issue” candidate.
- IV. Communication between five commissioners and city administrators might be more difficult.
- V. Change is not easy to accomplish.
- VI. Residents have the right to vote against this change.

Since its incorporation, Belle Meade has been governed by three commissioners. During that time, the city has maintained its character and has remained a sought after residential community. Based on the number of citizens who have been willing to serve on both standing committees and on study committees, the interest of citizens to participate in city affairs is high. In addition, as many new residents have moved into Belle Meade, they often bring interest in the City and possess valuable experience. For all these reasons, we believe expanding the number of commissioners from three to five would increase citizen interest and possibly add skills to the governance process.

We recommend the Commissioners approve the amendment to the City Charter, which then must be put before the citizens of Belle Meade for a vote.

**Charter of the City of Belle Meade, Tennessee**  
**Part 1 – Election of Commissioners**  
**Section 6-20-101, (c) and (d)**

(c) Any city having a population of less than five thousand (5,000) shall have the option of increasing the number of commissioners to five (5) by ordinance. In the next regular city election after the adoption of such an ordinance, voters shall be entitled to vote for three (3) commissioners, or four (4) commissioners as the case may be, and at the same election the approval of the ordinance shall also be submitted to the voters. If a majority of those voting on the ordinance shall be for approval and the number of commissioners to be elected is three (3), the two (2) receiving the highest number of votes shall hold office for four (4) years, and the third for two (2) years. If the number of commissioners to be elected is four (4), the two (2) receiving the highest number of votes shall hold office for four (4) years, and the other two (2) for two (2) years. The terms of all commissioners thereafter elected shall be for four (4) years, or until their successors are elected and qualified. An ordinance approved by the voters may not be repealed or amended. If a majority of those voting on the ordinance shall not be for approval, the ordinance shall be null and void, and the results of the election shall be certified as though the election were for one (1) commissioner, or two (2) commissioners as the case may be, and as though no ordinance had been adopted.

(d) An ordinance increasing the number of commissioners to five (5) may also be submitted to the voters in an election on the question which the board of commissioners directs the county election commission to hold. At such election voters shall be entitled to vote for two (2) commissioners to serve until the next regular city election. If a majority of those voting on the ordinance shall be for approval, the two (2) candidates for commissioner receiving the highest number of votes shall be declared elected. At the next regular city election if the number of commissioners to be elected is four (4), the three (3) receiving the highest number of votes shall hold office for four (4) years, and the fourth for two (2) years; if the number of commissioners to be elected is three (3), they shall hold office for four (4) years. The terms of all commissioners thereafter elected shall be for four (4) years, or until their successors are elected and qualified. If a majority of those voting on the ordinance in the special election shall not be for approval, the ordinance and the election of the two (2) commissioners shall be null and void.

**CITY OF BELLE MEADE**  
**STUDY COMMITTEE FOR INCREASE IN COMMISSIONERS**

**OCT. 2007**

<b>GRAND DIV.</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF BOARDMEMBERS</b>	<b>POPULATION</b>
West	Dyer	9	2,406
Middle	Woodbury	7	2,428
East	Jellico	6	2,448
East	Tusculum	3	2,498
East	Mountain City	5	2,500
West	Parsons	8	2,503
West	South Fulton	5	2,517
East	Bean Station	5	2,599
West	Brighton	5	2,636
West	Somerville	7	2,671
Middle	Monterey	9	2,717
Middle	Kingston Springs	6	2,773
West	Dresden	7	2,855
East	New Tazewell	7	2,875
Middle	White Bluff	6	2,929
Middle	Belle Meade	3	2,943
West	Newbern	7	2,988
Middle	Clifton	5	3,046
Middle	Algood	5	3,150
West	Oakland	5	3,169
East	Jasper	5	3,214
East	South Pittsburg	5	3,295
East	Oliver Springs	7	3,303
Middle	Nolensville	5	3,343
East	Gatlinburg	5	3,382
Middle	Coopertown	5	3,510
East	Unicoi	5	3,519
Middle	Pleasant View	5	3,645
East	Etowah	5	3,663
Middle	Hohenwald	5	3,754
Middle	Centerville	11	3,793
West	Camden	6	3,828
East	Oneida	5	3,832
Middle	Lafayette	7	3,885
East	Madisonville	6	3,939
Middle	Livingston	7	3,970
Middle	Smithville	6	3,994
Middle	Ashland City	7	4,050
Middle	Waverly	7	4,059
Middle	Dunlap	5	4,173
East	Rogersville	7	4,283
East	Jonesborough	5	4,314
West	Huntingdon	8	4,349
East	Harrogate	5	4,425
East	Loudon	5	4,476

Middle	Mount Pleasant	5	4,491
West	Selmer	6	4,541
West	Whiteville	7	4,640
West	Trenton	7	4,683
Middle	Forest Hills	3	4,710
Middle	Oak Hill	3	4,726
West	Tiptonville	7	4,765
East	Mount Carmel	7	4,795
West	Munford	7	5,004
Middle	Sparta	7	5,030
East	Pigeon Forge	5	5,172
East	Kingston	7	5,264
West	McKenzie	7	5,295
Middle	Greenbrier	7	5,373
East	Erwin	6	5,798
West	Bolivar	9	5,802
East	Rockwood	7	5,882
East	Church Hill	7	5,916
Middle	Lynchburg/Moore Co.	14	5,928
Middle	Millersville	5	6,129
West	Atoka	7	6,191
West	Henderson	7	6,195
East	Dayton	5	6,330
East	Collegedale	5	6,514
East	Sweetwater	6	6,567
East	Harriman	7	6,744
East	Lenoir City	7	6,819
Middle	Fayetteville	7	7,007
Middle	Fairview	5	7,014
West	Savannah	5	7,030
East	Newport	6	7,242
Middle	Hartsville/Trousdale Co.	21	7,259
Middle	Winchester	6	7,329
West	Lexington	7	7,393
West	Arlington	7	7,590

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