

Minneapolis Charter Commission Community Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 23, 2009 - 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
Minnesota Transitions School (Assembly Room)
2872 26th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Commissioners Present: Bernstein (Chair), Bujold, Ferrara, Jancik, Kadwell, Lichty, Metge, Rubenstein, Stade

Commissioners Excused: Clegg, Connell, Dolan, Lazarus, Remme, Street

Chair Bernstein called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m., a quorum being present. He thanked Tony Scallon and the Minnesota Transitions Charter School for allowing the Charter Commission to meet in their facility. He explained that the purpose of the community meeting was to accept public comment on the amendments to the Minneapolis City Charter as proposed by Council Members Ostrow, Remington, and Samuels. Speakers would be allowed approximately 2 minutes each. Comments were taken in the following order:

- a) Creation of a City Administrator Position
- b) Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation
- c) Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Council Member Paul Ostrow summarized the proposed amendments. He had also passed out a summary of the proposals, as well as draft ballot language. He stated that the draft ballot language had not been vetted by the City Attorney.

The City Administrator Proposal: Right now, no department head reports to the City Coordinator. The City Coordinator has direct control only over city administrative functions. The proposal creates a City Administrator position with broader authority. All department heads, including the Superintendent of Parks, would report to the City Administrator. The appointment authority would remain with the Mayor and the City Council, but once those individuals are appointed, they would be answerable to and disciplined or terminated by the City Administrator. This would clearly improve the lines of authority in City Hall. No longer would there be 14 bosses. The basic authority of the Mayor and Council to set the policies, vision, and budget of the city would be unaffected and actually improved. It will make the Council, the Mayor, and the citizens more effective because somebody will be in charge and will hold department heads accountable.

Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation: The reason there is a Board of Estimate and Taxation is because there are independent boards. He felt very strongly that one of the most important decisions of city government is setting the level of property taxes, and that should be determined by the Mayor and City Council. They should be accountable on this issue, and the proposal transfers that authority to the City Council where it is in almost every other city in America.

Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board: Ostrow stated that he is bringing this proposal forward because we need a green and sustainable agenda for our parks and our city

for the 21st century. Minneapolis citizens are passionate about the parks, and so are the Park Commissioners. This conversation is not about who is on the Park Board, but what is the best way to govern parks in this very challenging time. There are currently two separate police departments, planning departments, and administrative functions. The money saved in this reform could be invested back into the park systems. The proposed model has been followed all over the country. There would be a citizens Parks Commission, that would advise the Mayor and the City Council. The Mayor and the City Council will be held accountable for the parks at election time. Will the Mayor and the Council sell off the park land? No. The very same protections that are currently in the Charter relating to the parks will be incorporated into the proposal to make sure that wouldn't happen.

Creation of a City Administrator Position

a) Janet Gendler, 3906 Zenith Avenue South, President, Minnesota League of Women Voters, stated that the League of Women Voters (LWV) is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in all levels of government. In 2005, the LWV Minneapolis studied city government. The study states, in part: "We discovered in our preparation of this study some criteria that seem to be equally equated with good government - accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity, and accessibility. Other factors such as flexibility, cost effectiveness, diversity, and sustainability were also mentioned. The goal is to balance the criteria in a way that allows for solid decision making and effective governance." The membership supports using the current structure of city government with key changes such as city staff reporting to one authority so that there are clear lines of responsibility. Membership was split on whether that should be a Mayor with more authority or a city manager. They do not support the current system in which department heads answer to 14 bosses. That system frustrates the key values of accountability and transparency in government operations.

b) Patricia Kovel-Jarboe, 4816 West Lake Harriet Parkway, stated that she was speaking in favor of all three proposals for Charter change. She was a member of the Minneapolis League of Women Voters, although was speaking only for herself, and was also a member of one of the City's appointed boards. She had a PhD in organizational communication and had studied organizations for over two decades. She believed that in an era of constrained resources and increasing resident needs, Minneapolis must achieve both new efficiencies and greater results. The complex and convoluted city government structure results in redundancy, confusion, and all too often, allows for finger pointing rather than problem solving when something goes wrong. She supported the proposal to create a City Administrator while continuing to involve the Mayor, Executive Committee, and City Council in making appointments because this will further clarify accountability, encourage the selection and retention of capable department heads, and quickly remove those who perform poorly, while removing political considerations in appointments and terminations. She supported the elimination of both the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board so that only one body, the City Council, would be held accountable for raising and spending revenues and establishing policies and practices. She wanted a government structure that allowed every city resident to know what decisions are being made and by whom. The elected Park Board is an anomaly. Other jurisdictions with equally strong park and recreation programs have flourished under a variety of governmental structures. In addition, recent election results show that far more ballots are cast in mayoral and council races than for any other elected positions. She wanted to see extensive public discussion on these proposals and their inclusion on the November ballot.

c) Susan A. Lane, 3644 45th Avenue South, stated that she was frustrated with the lack of information. There is no information as to government costs per capita compared to other cities. How are the proposals going to save money and how much money will be saved? There is a lot of talk about savings, yet she has seen no information about it which made it hard for her to make an informed decision. Also, she has found that the more streamlined the line of power is, the less transparent government becomes. The inefficiencies in our present form of government ultimately result in more discussion and debate. She felt it was good to have the checks and balances in government, and the proposal eliminates them.

d) Parker Trostel, 3349 St. Louis Avenue, stated that she moved to Minneapolis in January of 1974, and in 1978 she was Alderman of the 7th Ward. There is a tendency for mischief if the lines of authority are not clear. If there is accountability, then it is very clear. If people think that there is the potential for mischief, the terms for elected officials should be reduced to two years. Four years gives the elected officials the time to figure out how to go around and get what they want in perhaps a negative way rather than making policy, which is what the City Council should be about. In a city the size of Minneapolis, the city manager position makes a lot of sense financially and from a policy point of view.

e) Scott Vreeland, 2437 33rd Avenue South, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Commissioner, stated that this meeting was really for the benefit of the Charter Commission. What is before the Charter Commission today is more important than the Plain Language Charter Revision they have spent the last five years working on. He noted from the draft minutes from the April 1 Charter Commission meeting the great deal of respect and careful diplomacy in the Commissioners' conversations about how to proceed with the Revision that is intended to change nothing except increase clarity. The Charter Commission has prudently worked with both the Park Board and the City Council to assure that there were opportunities for people to comment, jurisdictional review, and no unintended consequences of the Revised Charter. Quoting the draft minutes: "Bernstein felt it wasn't the Commission's intent to force the Council to consider something that they weren't ready to consider." "Ferrara stated we do not want to place the revision on the ballot without the City Council's review." "Bujold stated that this is not an issue that should be delegated to the electorate. It is critical that the Council approve these non-substantive amendments by a 13-0 vote." Tonight the Charter Commission has before them the most substantive changes in the history of the Charter. Mr. Vreeland supported none of them and asked that they not be placed on the 2009 ballot. He was concerned that these meetings were exactly the wrong way to discuss public policy and did not allow an opportunity to discuss the underlying issues of how to make this a better city. These changes slam the door in the three places that are appropriate venues for such discussion — the City Council, the Park Board, and the Board of Estimate and Taxation. Why is it appropriate to spend years of thoughtful contemplation on the Charter Revision when there is no substantive change, yet rush forward with a poorly thought out and unpopular proposal? Why would the Charter Commission move forward without jurisdictional comment or review when the three jurisdictions would be radically changed or eliminated? These proposals are not ready for prime time. They don't have the support of the City Council, Mayor, or Park Board and he also didn't think they had the support of the people. Consolidating power and eliminating grass roots democracy doesn't make the city better. But there are four other reasons not to put this on the ballot: (1) The good work that the Charter Commission has done on the Plain Language Revisions would be put in jeopardy; (2) Focus should be on ballot education for the new IRV format which will create confusion; (3) It is brutally disrespectful to eliminate eleven elected officials the day after they are elected; and (4) Why would this be considered as a ballot

question without the due diligence of the legal legislative details that would be necessary to make these proposals viable. What are the costs to the tax payers for the ballot? These Charter amendments are intended to create darkness instead of light. Putting incredibly political questions of completely changing city government on the ballot that have not been vetted by any of the jurisdictions affected or subjected to any legal review is the topic of tonight's meeting. This is not the thoughtful process about how to improve the City's government or the relationships between jurisdictions. It is a bitter and cynical approach to governance with a trifecta of consolidating control, eliminating grass roots democracy, and eliminating access to decision makers. What should happen is that we have strong neighborhood group input into public policy, that we have a great park system that is the backbone, ecological, and economic benefit for a great city, that we have elected Park Board Commissioners that have that mission and vision, and that we elect a third public member to the Board of Estimate and Taxation so that there is balance and oversight and that we ask the City Council members to be thoughtful advocates for both their constituents and the city at large.

f) Ted Kolderie, St. Paul, stated that he covered the 1960 campaign in Minneapolis for the Minneapolis Tribune and wrote about a similar campaign. Those were the second and third strong mayor campaigns which was felt to be the best form of city government at that time. Both failed by wide margins. When he became the Executive Director of the Citizens League in 1967, he was committed to rethinking this policy. Over the years in which he was at City Hall almost every day, he encountered the argument that it is the people who count. Good people can make any system work. Structure doesn't matter; the rules by which people play have a lot to do with how they work together and how effectively things get done. In a series of reports from about 1973 to 1975, the Citizens League made several recommendations: (1) Welcoming the establishment of an orderly system of neighborhood councils in Minneapolis. (2) Addressing the question of political city-wide leadership. The proposal at that time was for a merger of the offices of Mayor and City Council President. What happened over the years was the creation of the Executive Committee. (3) The strengthening of the administrative functions and the transition from a coordinator to an administrator system. Over the years, the city has continually shed functions. The public hospital, workhouse, juvenile facility, and libraries all went to the county. The schools and the airport broke away. With the current financial stress, it makes basic sense for the city today to develop the kind of internal strength in its administration and management that comes specifically with the establishment of a city administrator position.

g) Bob Distad, 611 5th Street Southeast, stated that he was in favor of creating a City Administrator position. There are incredible pressures placed on the housing stock in the University of Minnesota area. In the past 20 years, this neighborhood has been trying to get the Housing Inspectors to be a little bit more aggressive about enforcing those portions of the Housing Code that are readily enforced in other parts of the city. When trying to deal with these issues, he found that the department head who ran the Inspections Department didn't just report to one person. The properties in the University area are not owned by people who live in southeast Minneapolis. They are owned by people who live all around the city of Minneapolis. Consequently, a number of different Council Members had their own agendas which were played out in the back room. With a strong City Administrator and some lines of accountability there would be more equity in the enforcement of not just the housing laws, but a number of other things such as plowing and road repair. As long as department heads report to as many as 14 people, there will be the opportunity for mischief. Relative to the gentleman who spoke for the Park Board, he wanted to point out an admonition that he heard a number of years ago: "when you don't have the facts, argue the law; and when you don't have the law, you argue the

facts". He hadn't heard any specifics from the gentleman; just basically that change is bad and don't let the people who live in the city of Minneapolis have a voice in how the city is run.

h) Julia McGuire, had signed in to speak, but was not present when her name was called.

i) Lyall Schwarzkopf, 4840 Bloomington Avenue, stated that he was the City Clerk in Minneapolis for 14 years and the City Coordinator for 10 years. The current city governance is disjointed. While there are 13 Council Members, each Council Member believes he or she is in charge of running the government because they are all elected by the people. The Mayor believes he is in charge of running the government because he is elected by the people. The Mayor doesn't have as much authority as the Council Members do, but he believes he does. The City Coordinator is supposed to implement the policies of the City Council and Mayor, but the City Coordinator has no authority to do that. Then there is the Park Board and they do their own thing. The Board of Estimate and Taxation also does their own thing. In addition, there are two different agencies that handle employment in the city of Minneapolis: the Civil Service Commission and the City Coordinator. No one has responsibility and nobody is in charge of the city unless all those boards and all those 14 people cooperate, which is very difficult to do in a political situation. Today's economy gives an opportunity to really begin to govern this city and govern it well, making it more efficient and effective and saving a lot of tax payer money. Duplication can be avoided by establishing a City Administrator where there is one person that is really involved and running the city and who carries out the policies of the Council and has the authority to work with department heads.

Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation

a) Janet Gendler, 3906 Zenith Avenue South, President, Minnesota League of Women Voters (LWV), stated that following their 2005 study, the membership of the LWV overwhelmingly supported the elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and supported the Mayor and City Council jointly setting the mil levy.

b) Cheryl Luger, 5015 35th Avenue South, spoke in opposition of the proposed amendment. Not only does the Board of Estimate and Taxation issue bonds and make sure that the independent boards receive their share of the funding, their most important role is the independent audit function that they perform. Letting the City Council take over the independent audit function is comparable to letting the fox sit with the chickens, and that is a very real threat. The Charter gives us extra protection and extra credibility and allows us to work more efficiently. Little money will be saved by eliminating the Board of Estimate and Taxation. By eliminating various boards you are not necessarily gaining accountability. Accountability has to have a certain degree of transparency and that comes through debate, checks and balances, and discussion among elected individuals and the independent boards. Without that, there will be a lot less input into government. Shared power is not always a bad thing; it is not always duplication and ineffectiveness. The rush of this process has also been very upsetting. This is something that should be discussed. The library decision was rushed through in a very short period of time and some of the resulting problems are being worked out now. Also, she hoped to come before the Charter Commission sometime in the future and see if a discussion could begin regarding two-year terms for City Council members and a part-time Council.

c) Susan A. Lane, 3644 45th Avenue South, stated that in the years she worked for the Park Board, she appeared before the Board of Estimate and Taxation regarding many projects for the

Park Board. It was another place where they had to stand up and defend what they were doing and bring neighborhood support or they wouldn't get the money. That was not a bad thing. They had to really be able to defend what they wanted to do. That process was very beneficial. She did not think that eliminating these boards would add efficiency, and she didn't think the citizens had a clear picture of how those functions would be picked up. This has not been discussed enough yet. It is not ready for a public vote because the issues are way too complicated.

d) Jerry Dustrud, 400 East Grant Street, President of the Grant Park Homeowners Association in Downtown Minneapolis, stated that while he was only speaking on behalf of himself, in the role of President of the homeowners association he had developed some experience and ideas that have worked well for the association. It is possible to have one board and one oversight organization with subcommittees reporting to the board that do much of the same work that is done now by a group of people. Obviously in a homeowners association, these are all volunteer positions, so there is no dollar savings. But it does bring effectiveness and transparency, as well as gaining ideas and input from a large array of people. Another way of gathering ideas and input from a community to the City Council is through the neighborhood representative. Using his experience as a homeowner association president in the Elliot Park Neighborhood, he believed the idea of eliminating the formal position of the Board of Estimate and Taxation would be, in effect, just renaming it and the same goals and results would be accomplished with a different structure reporting to one individual.

e) Carol Becker, 3201 48th Avenue South, stated that she was a member of the Board of Estimate and Taxation. The Board of Estimate and Taxation does three things: (1) They set the maximum property tax levy. They do not set the tax levy. The Park Board and the City Council set their tax levy. If this function didn't exist, and there was an independent Park Board and an independent City Council and they each set their own tax levy, you would be asking for someone to perform this function. That is what the Board of Estimate and Taxation already does. If the Board of Estimate and Taxation were eliminated and all of the power of the purse given to the City Council, there would very quickly be no independent Park Board. The Board of Estimate and Taxation gives the Park Board some independence in their funding. We live in a capitalistic society and people in capitalistic societies look for ways to make money off of assets. One hundred years ago we set aside our parks with the Park Board to protect them. If the Board of Estimate and Taxation is not there to make sure there is some independence in funding, that board will not be there to protect those assets. (2) Clean government does not just happen. Auditors should not report to the people who are being audited. They should report to an independent board. (3) The Board of Estimate and Taxation manages the borrowing of money for the City Council and for the Park Board. In that process, the City Council and the Park Board have to agree on park priorities. Also, if the Board of Estimate and Taxation is eliminated, the legislature hasn't given authority to the City Council to borrow money. So if the Board of Estimate and Taxation is eliminated in November, the City will not have any way to borrow money for fire stations, parks, street construction, etc. The legislature will then have to vote on whether or not we get a park or a fire station. That is not good public policy. The Board of Estimate and Taxation must be retained in order to maintain the independent Park Board and to maintain democracy.

f) Bob Distad, stated that the City Council can certainly manage the affairs of the money. If they need additional authority to borrow, he was sure that was a detail that could be worked out. Hennepin County has no Board of Estimate and Taxation even though it also has a AAA bond

rating. They manage with a County Administrator. There is no need for the Board of Estimate and Taxation to continue. In fact, it only diverts attention from the real responsibility of the Park Board and the City Council to do business with each other, sort out their priorities, and come to some agreement.

g) Mary Merrill Anderson, 1144 Cedarview Drive, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Commissioner, stated she was in favor of keeping the Board of Estimate and Taxation and adding another elected member to the Board. The Board of Estimate and Taxation looks at the taxation policy. Although some people say that is not efficient or effective, she felt it was democracy. There has been no substantive conversation about the government services that are delivered by independent boards. The Park Board did this eight years ago with the City Council. They sat down and really looked at the services provided. They were in conversation with one another. That same kind of conversation needs to happen now before discussion at a public level.

Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

a) William Shroyer, 3856 38th Avenue South, arborist for the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board and a union steward for Laborers International/City Employees 363 stated that he was a tree inspector and a Park Board certified arborist. He was proud to have a civil service job and proud to be a Minneapolis resident. In his position as union steward, he represented both City and Park Board employees. At this point in time there are pressures on the budget. There are invasive species like the ash borer and gypsy moth infecting the trees. The Park Board has a 125 year legacy of protecting the trees, land, parks, water, and lakes. This is too important to leave to the caprices of people elected to the City Council or the Mayor. It is too complicated and confusing to put before the voters. Park Board employees have a unique perspective to protect the trees, land, and water and look at the long term benefits. More time should be spent on analyzing this issue.

b) Scott Erasmus, 6045 Lyndale Avenue South, speaking as a resident, stated that he was against placing the Park Board under the City Council's rule. According to Council Member Ostrow's statements, the proposed city organizational chart will place Minneapolis in line with cities around the nation. Unfortunately, he was not as enthusiastic about Detroit, Chicago, or St. Louis. Minneapolis is a great city. The parks will suffer by placing the Park Board under City Council rule. He had not yet seen anything showing that this move will save money. He felt it would only direct money elsewhere. This process is being rushed because they want to pull the wool over the citizen's eyes. This is an economic climate in which people are scared and more willing to listen to such proposals. He saw this as politicians spinning a web of lies and directing money elsewhere.

c) Janet Gendler, 3906 Zenith Avenue South, President, Minneapolis League of Women Voters, stated that the League of Women Voter's 2006 study of the city's independent boards stated in part that "Minneapolis has some of the finest parks and libraries in the nation, but current governing structures are often described as cumbersome and counter-productive. In these days of ever dwindling tax resources, the issue of the structure of governance of both systems raises important questions for their vitality, efficiency, and effectiveness. From 1974 until the conclusion of the 2006 study, the League of Women Voters supported an independent Park Board. Following the 2006 study, the League of Women Voters now has no position on the issue. This is a change in our long-standing position of supporting the Park Board.

Although a majority of members did not support any one approach to the park governance, the wide range of their opinions suggests both that there may be problems in the current structure and that there is the need for further deliberation on this issue. The League of Women Voters welcomes open public discussions of these important issues at this critical time in the City's history."

d) Patricia Kovel-Jarboe, 4816 West Lake Harriet Parkway, stated that most other cities with a four star rating, such as Minneapolis, do not have an elected park board. They have public council or mayor oversight of their park systems.

e) Steve Berg, 100 2nd Street Northeast, stated that he was the co-author of a 2004 Star Tribune article on city governance, and displayed the chart used in the article. He was in favor of allowing the voters to express their views on the three proposed charter amendments. We live in extraordinary times. Global forces are changing our lives in profound and fundamental ways. A deep and prolonged recession has squeezed government budgets and forced us to reconsider priorities. An energy crisis and climate change further compels us to integrate nature and green technology into the daily lives of all. Demographic changes, especially in the decline in the size of households, will force us into smaller dwelling units and cozier neighborhoods in the decades to come, but that in turn places an enormous premium on the quality of public spaces. We have a very large per capita park system in this city. It is the largest of almost any city in the country. The biggest challenge lies not in the parks but in greening the rest of the city, in integrating green principals into every block, business, school, household, and public street and sidewalk. Will future citizens be best served by keeping the parks quarantined and fenced off from the rest of the city structure or will it be best served by integrating green principals into every aspect of city life? That is a question that the Charter Commission and the voters should consider.

f) Lonnie Nichols 2644 35th Avenue South, stated that he was opposed to the elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. The Park Board is responsible for the program operation and maintenance of all Minneapolis parks. The proposal is not very complete. It only covers police and maintenance issues. The Park Board is responsible for so much more than police and maintenance such as all the programming in the parks, including athletics and after-school programs. What will happen to all the other people who are doing important jobs for the Park Board? He was also opposed to the elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

g) Cheryl Luger, 5015 35th Avenue South, spoke in opposition of the proposed amendment. The independent Park Board was established over 100 years ago by the state legislature to protect the land from the speculators. This is another type of power grab. The Park Board has an independent relationship with the city and the Board of Estimate and Taxation. With decreases in LGA funding and increases in property taxes, the city is in bad shape. What is the first asset sold when there is a financial crisis? It is the land. The parks. We have protections on developments with the shoreline overlay district. Efficiency doesn't always equal effectiveness. With a grass roots democracy, having an elected Park Board protects the citizens. A lot of work went into the studies done by the League of Women Voters which went on over several years. To rush this process, have it dumped on the citizens now right before a major election change this fall, is unfair to the voters of this city. If the Charter Commission wants to have this discussion, it should be stretched out a bit so the proposals can be studied further before they are put before the voters.

h) Al Flowers, Minneapolis resident, office at the Urban League, passed out two documents relating to city finances and lawsuits against the city. He stated the City Council and Mayor were turning into a dictatorship. The libraries were lost to the County, the MCDA changed to CPED, the neighborhood associations were taken away, and now they are going after the parks. This is about money. In the last four years the taxpayers have paid out \$15,000,000 in settlements against the city of Minneapolis. We need to start trying to reduce that amount and then we can give our parks more money and keep the Board of Estimate and Taxation intact. The citizens better watch the money being paid out and ask why we paying this much money out. He was trying to follow this money.

i) Audie Gillespie, 3225 24th Street East, Local 363, stated that no one could convince him that taking away nine elected, accountable officials and replacing them with one appointed official would equal more transparency. He attends most of the Park Board Commission meetings and they are true democracy at work. People are heard, their issues are acted upon, and things change because of it. He grew up across the street from Webber Park. There was a proposal to put in new tennis courts and his mother didn't like where they were going to be located because they would take out mature elm trees. She and neighbors went to a Park Board Commission meeting and actually changed where the tennis courts would be placed. From that he learned a valuable lesson, and still sees it in practice at almost every Park Board meeting. He was opposed to the elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.

j) Betty Ellison Harpole, 3804 10th Avenue South, stated that she opposed the elimination of the Park Board. She felt it would simply be more politics as usual. The proposed organizational chart puts Minneapolis citizens at the top; but she felt the opinion of the citizens was not valued. While she was in college, she worked for the Park Board every summer. She has lived in Minneapolis since 1979, and it is like pulling teeth to get money from the city to try to have programs for the children. She was very much opposed to the elimination of the Park Board.

k) David Grout, 2832 32nd Avenue South, dispatcher for the Park Board, stated that he worked with the creeks, rivers and forestry districts. The accountability of the employees is four star. All requests or questions are responded to immediately. Everyone he works with is very dedicated and constantly working on better ways and improving how they do business. Employees are encouraged to find ways to improve the system. Suggestions are implemented.

l) Susan A. Lane, 3644 45th Avenue South, signed in to speak but stated that she would pass.

m) Jeremy Lane, 3644 45th Avenue South, Director of Legal Aid, stated that he was speaking on behalf of himself. The major reason he moved to Minneapolis 40 years ago was because of the park system. It is a magnet for good people to come and make this city a better place. He has seen what passes for a park system in other cities when parks are just another issue on a crowded city council agenda. The parks are not just another amenity of this city, but the crown jewel of Minneapolis. They are a lot of what makes this city different. Even if it is a little less cost effective, he wanted to elect people who have one mission in life - protecting and enhancing the park system. To the argument that most other cities have a different system, the Minneapolis park system is not like many other cities, it is just flat out better. That is not an accident, and we should do what we can to protect it.

n) Diane Steen, St. Louis Park, working at Trinity Lutheran Church, 2001 Riverside Avenue, stated that she considers herself a big stakeholder in the park system because working at the church, she brings children she teaches to Murphy Park. They have asked, and received, from the Park Board permission to plant trees in honor of the children's fathers that had been murdered. To suggest putting this proposal on the ballot in a year when the city is planning to implement Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is too much. It is enough for the citizens to digest a new voting system. Also, RCV will allow proportional representation, and smaller commissions such as the Park Board give a chance for people who may not be quite as economically advantaged to try to get elected to office. A lot of the foot soldiers for RCV were the smaller parties, the independence and green party people, and being able to win one of those Park Board seats is a possibility for them with RCV but then the next day, the Park Board would be eliminated.

o) Dean Carlson, 3937 Aldrich Avenue South, stated that he had lived in Minneapolis for 30 years. He was an avid user of the park system: coaching soccer, riding the Grand Rounds, swimming in the lakes, playing softball, etc. He was in favor of the proposed Charter change to replace the elected Park Board with an appointed advisory board. There is no evidence whatsoever that the governance structure of the city's parks has an impact on the quality of the parks and recreational facilities. There are many American cities, big and small, that do not have an elected park board yet have highly rated parks, including Boston, Portland, Albuquerque, and Denver. Some of the cities with the highest per capita spending on parks don't have an elected park board. What separates great park systems is support by the residents of that city, not the governing board. Why would the proposed Charter amendments destroy our parks? Would the Council members and Mayor allow the parks to be diminished if they had ultimate responsibility over them? How long would a Council member or Mayor last in office if that happened? The problem with a separately elected park board is that Minneapolis residents are basically presented with a split responsibility on parks. Obviously the Mayor and City Council are very concerned about what happens in the parks, but have no oversight over the policies. The Park Board wants to do what's best for the parks, but they have minimal control over its budget authority. To a resident, it is confusing. A separately elected Park Board actually reduces accountability and when accountability is reduced, it furthers the distance between government and the people. If an elected Park Board is a more representative form of government, why did a group of Minneapolis citizens feel compelled to create an organization called Minneapolis Park Watch? Right now, no one entity is responsible for the issues facing the parks. It is always "the other guys" at the root of the problem. By bringing the parks within the city governing system, that confusion is gone. The city can speak with one voice regarding parks and recreation, and responsibility and accountability will rest solely with the City Council and Mayor.

p) Wanda Richardson, 3737 13th Avenue South, stated that she was in support of an independent Park Board. One of things she learned from her grandparents was if it's not broke, don't fix it; and if it does break down, don't throw it out, fix it. She has lived in Minneapolis for 20 years, and no other place she has lived has had a park system equal to Minneapolis. Our parks are fantastic. The people who work in the parks are fantastic. She has never had a problem dealing with the Park Board. While she may not agree with the things they do, there has never been any confusion when she consults them about an issue. It is dealt with. It may not be the most efficient, cost effective way to do business; but sometimes efficiency or cost effectiveness is not a true value. A lot of that comes from a corporate mentality and she didn't particularly want corporate mentality to make decisions for citizens. It is sometimes inefficient for people to

argue and debate and hold different points of view, but it allows citizens to represent themselves and be independent. The independent Park Board does an outstanding job of maintaining our parks and should be looked at as a model for some of the other city functions that aren't working quite as well.

q) Cary Lawrence, 3604 15th Avenue South, stated that her son spent hours at the park playing hockey with many, many other neighborhood kids. Today, there are hundreds of kids at the park every afternoon. She doubted if that would be the same if the city ran the parks. The city is too busy building its hierarchy. She couldn't even find out how many people work in the Mayor's office. She had lived outside Boston for eight years and has also been to parks in Portland, Oregon, and they are not all that great. If people walking down Nicollet Mall were polled, 80% would say leave the parks alone. She challenged the city to spend their time and efforts on things that reflect at least some concern on the part of all of the citizens of Minneapolis. The citizens want their Park Board to stay the way it is. Discuss the city manager position, but leave the Park Board alone.

r) Starla Krause, 2300 Victory Memorial Parkway, signed up to speak but was not present when her name was called.

s) Rick Kane, 3524 Colfax Avenue South, stated that he was a homeowner, a volunteer in the parks, and one-time Volunteer of the Year for Lyndale Park. He had not seen a concrete argument made to eliminate the Park Board. The Park Board has not been shown to be inefficient. Nothing against Public Works, but look at the condition of the streets. Adding park maintenance to their workload will not be efficient. Since his City Council member was not running for reelection, he couldn't approach the issue politically because there is no vested interest on the part of his Council Member. He fully supported keeping the Park Board as it is.

t) Bill Baker, 2625 2nd Avenue South, stated that he grew up in Maryland and moved to Minneapolis in 1999. When his contract didn't get picked up, he chose to stay mainly because of the park system. He re-tooled his career just to stay in Minneapolis. He is an avid roller blader and birder and uses the park system for both. The park system provides a reason for people to relocate to Minneapolis. He was concerned about the tasks of the Park Board that the amendment proposed be transferred to the Public Works Department. The citizens will suffer. It will take just as many people to manage the park system if the Park Board is eliminated, if not more.

u) Robert Samolyk, 3832 17th Avenue South, Equipment Mechanic with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, stated he was speaking as a homeowner and long time Minneapolis resident. He was opposed to the elimination of the Park Board. He believed that by eliminating the Park Board and putting it under the City Council, the overall quality of the parks will totally degenerate. Merging the Park Police into the Minneapolis Police Department will decrease security. We have a safe park system that has been intact for over 120 years. It is not broken. Don't fix it.

v) Mary Merrill Anderson, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Commissioner, stated that 126 years ago some citizens in the city of Minneapolis went to the legislature because they were concerned that their need to create a system of parks was not being adhered to by the City Council and Mayor who didn't see why we needed to spend our precious tax dollars on acquiring things like Lake Calhoun or Lake Harriet. Following the teachings of H.W.S. Cleveland, one of the things that the park system has done over and over again is to be

creative, to think about leading the way for the citizens. She challenged anyone to look at the numbers of the Park Board and see if they had not been most efficient with the dollars they had been entrusted with. They have been more efficient with taxpayers' dollars than the City Council and the Mayor. It is apparent around the country when there is not a protector of the park system, the parks decline. They rise and they fall with the love of a mayor or city council. Our City Council and Mayor in their tax policy decided on an 8% tax levy for the city of Minneapolis but only 4% for the parks and libraries. Parks are not being funded and the priority of the City Council and Mayor is apparent. They have other things to take care of, such as police, fire, and development. The Park Board takes care of the parks. It has been an ethic that has been passed down through the generations. and she planned to pass it on to her grandchildren.

w) Carol Becker, 3201 48th Avenue South, stated that we had efficient government 200 years ago when we had a king. It was transparent and we knew who to hold accountable. It didn't work so well. Groups of people arguing back and forth is what makes for a government. The Board of Estimate and Taxation members get paid \$35 a month. It hasn't been raised since 1920. Eliminating the boards will not save money. The question is really: do you believe that many hands and many voices make a stronger democracy, or do you think that fewer hands and fewer voices make for a better, more transparent government? In the last ten years, how many Council Members have been convicted of corruption? In the past 125 years, how many Park Board members have been convicted of corruption? What kind of government do you believe in? She hoped the Charter Commission thought about their values and the values that brought them here tonight.

Chair Bernstein again thanked Tony Scallon and Minnesota Transitions Charter School for the hospitality of allowing the Charter Commission the use of the school for the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Peggy Menshek
Charter Commission Coordinator