

May 13, 2005
2620 Stevens Ave., S.,
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Jim Bernstein, Chair
Charter Commission,
% City Clerk's Office, Room 304,
350 S. 5th Street,
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Dear Mr. Bernstein:

Thank you for affording both myself and the general public the opportunity to make comments on changes pending the City of Minneapolis Charter.

It would seem to me the incentive compelling the interest in changing the Minneapolis City Charter to be driven mostly by three principle issues:

- the current period decreasing resources, i.e., revenue. That is to suggest that no presently existing form of City governance would be satisfactory.
- secondly, an interest of some in reducing representation of a portion of the general public, especially the poor or disadvantaged. Evidence of may be portrayed by the desire to reduce the number of City Council seats.
- thirdly, the perception may be that the independent boards, especially the School Board, have not served the general public interest well. Indeed, with respect to the pension funding, individual costs per student, and student success rates overall, shall we say, the question is well worth asking.
- Our hometown newspaper, the Star-Tribune, used to have regular, if not frequent, front page "A"-section coverage of Minneapolis Police misconduct, abuse of authority, and brutality.
- Zoning and Planning, Inspections and Public Works draw considerable criticism. However, their intention is allegedly to insure City ordinances, previously passed by the City Council are met. Ironically, the people who have problems with these departments are usually limited to the same people improving the City overall.

The previous are "big-ticket" items. However, I do think substantive City Charter changes are mandatory. Criticism of Minneapolis exists in the State legislature. So if the Charter Commission does not change City governance, a state law enacted by the legislature may.

Not much can be done about a dip in the economic cycle, but I urge the Charter Commission to consider the following changes to the City Charter:

- Whatever change in Minneapolis Governance, insure that it does nothing to reduce the access of citizens - to include the poor and disadvantaged - access to their Councilmember. The Mayor, another *elected* position, really should have all the authority necessary to serve the City.
- Eliminate the independent School Board. The educators that make up the Board have served the interests of the teachers more than the citizens of Minneapolis - especially the children-citizens.
- Give the Minneapolis Civilian (Police) Review Board subpoena power - put teeth in the bite. Chief McManus has done a remarkable job quieting complaints against Police. Some Officers are caught in compromising situations; others are perhaps in the wrong career. I fear the beast only sleeps.
- Some of the complaints against Z&P, Inspections, and Public Works may have merit, and when and if they are picayune, frivolous, or ridiculous it would seem the duty of a Councilmember to step in and negotiate resolution to the dispute.

Again, thank you for letting me offer my opinion, I envy your position because the Charter Commission is in a position to cause change to make a difference. I do not envy the difficulty you might have recommending change.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce A. Lundeen". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bruce A. Lundeen

Bartell, Julie M - Clerks

From: barbara Vaile [barbara@organicconsumers.org]
Sent: Tuesday, May 17, 2005 9:33 AM
To: Bartell, Julie M - Clerks
Subject: Is peace reflected in Charter?

Dear Ms. Bartell:

Is peace reflected in the Charter?

Might we be known as a place that includes peace endorsement, reflection, peace studies?

If we do not include peace in our vision, by default we may with our current system of endless growth, be endorsing war.

With all best wishes,
Barbara Vaile

7520 Cahill Road,
Minneapolis 55439

Charter Commission Chair Jim Bernstein and Commission Members

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis (LWVMpls), I want to offer several comments concerning the Minneapolis City Charter, city structure and the process of charter revision.

I am glad to learn that you have scheduled two public hearings in May on Minneapolis' City governance structures. I am writing to request that you add additional public hearings for several reasons. First, as advocates for good government the Minneapolis League believes that it is essential for any charter change proposals to be preceded by opportunities for citizen engagement. Certainly some of this can come after changes are proposed, but we believe that changes will have a better chance of success if they truly reflect the thinking of a goodly number of the City's residents. This will undoubtedly require more than two hearings.

Second, the League has just completed a study on city government structure which our 330+ members are reviewing during the month of May. Our member consensus and our League positions will be public by mid June. LWVMpls has been highly regarded during our 80+ years of studying local government and advocating positions based on thorough, non-partisan research. We have played an active role in previous charter change processes. For these reasons, we would like League positions, existing as well as any additional ones, which result from our new study, to be part of this charter change discussion.

We would also like the opportunity to present and discuss with the commission a recently completed state study (LWV MN) about instant run-off voting. I think the Charter Commission will find this interesting also when examining potential charter change.

The League is happy to meet with you and talk about these issues and work together.

Sincerely,

Joan Niemiec
City Government Structure Committee Chair
League of Women Voters of Minneapolis

Bartell, Julie M - Clerks

From: Mary.Gorman@med.va.gov
Sent: Wednesday, April 27, 2005 2:20 PM
To: Bartell, Julie M - Clerks
Subject: Re: Power Structures

I will not be able to attend the meetings on the Minneapolis Charter but wanted to voice my view (which includes many friends that always complain but never step forward).

When it comes to police matters, I feel the Mayor should only have partial involvement. He is not involved on the street every night and can never know what the officers have to deal with. I feel sorry for anyone that has to deal with the mentality of the criminals out there and the gangs in this country have become not just a local problem but a national one. No more nice, we need to deal with 'anyone' that does a crime-should do the time. No more Mr. Nice Guy. Until you are personally attacked on the street, or have your home or personal property violated you cannot possibly know what it feels like. That is a freedom that has been taken away from you for the rest of your life! The terrorist aren't oversees, they are the criminals we deal with here. Minors know they get no jail sentence and have many priors before they reach adult hood. Arrest and serve time the first time and the courts won't be so busy in a few years.

The City Council had refused to accept signed signatures some years back for a vote on the ballot for term appointments. I do not know how this council was formed and who determined who would have these jobs, but they should not have longer appointments than our mayor or governor (or the President of the United States for that matter). They do not speak for the 'original' people of Minnesota (and I am not speaking of race, just people who have been born here, worked here, paid taxes here for generations, etc.) on all issues. How many times do the citizens have to say no to public funding for the stadiums? They, and the governor, are taking our rights away in making decisions on how our money is spent. Both on Welfare, Sports and Public Education. All major issues should be on the ballot for vote and not be allowed to come up more than twice in a role. We need to learn to move on to other issues and not dwell on pet projects for the wealthy. The City Council's size should be dependent upon a member from each Ward for the seven county metro area.

The NENA program started out well, but that has turned into more funding for businesses than home owners. Criteria for home owners should not just be determined on income, but health and other issues too. I applaud all the people involved thru the years, but it's time to put more money into the home owners hands in the form of grants. Why should immigrants get low interest, or interest free money to buy and fix up homes and we have to pay. (Our poor veterans). Why should profit making business get money before the homeowners?

MNDOT has too much power!!!! MAC Commission should be fired! Why has the airport grown to so much power and we keep giving them money and forgiven loans? I heard they laid off mechanics and spent their pensions, yet the CEO's still get large bonuses?

Healthcare costs and benefits should be the same accross the board for county, city, state and federal employees.
 I sure do not want to pay for someone else to have better benefits than I get.

Gun Permits should be issued at all local governments where car licenses can be purchased. You still have to run a check. By the way, why don't we check for car insurance requirements anymore when obtaining a license? If we don't need insurance then we don't need the positions/management that oversaw those check points.

Not enough time has been given for constituents to think this through.

M. Gorman

J. Villerius

Members of the City Charter Commission:

My name is John Villerius. I have been a city resident and taxpayer since October 1990. I have lived at 4732 14th Avenue South since May 1994. I want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to submit comments about city organizational issues.

My basis for speaking about the issues for which you are asking comments is three-fold.

First and foremost, I am a resident and member of the community. Perhaps it is cliché, but, I want my city to function with effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. I place the greatest value on accountability because effectiveness and efficiency flow naturally from accountability.

Second, I am a career public servant with a graduate degree in public management and 14 years of local government management experience in finance and technology management. I have a professional interest in seeing public organizations be able to adapt to meet the current and future needs of its citizens.

Third, I am a former employee of the City of Minneapolis. In the Minneapolis Finance Department, I held an appointed position of director of financial systems administration from September 1998 until January 2002. I did not enjoy my short tenure as a city employee. I resigned – voluntarily – with the feeling that I do not live in a well-run city and that the city organization did not allow me to produce anything of value to my community.

Most of my comments here address City Hall as an organization, drawing upon my experiences as an employee and my observations as a citizen.

I believe that the city with its so-called weak mayor system, and four elected boards – the city council, and the park and library boards and the board of estimate – lacks accountability. The weak mayor and 13-ward system is an anachronism held over from olden days when most issues were internal to a ward and were resolved or brokered by the alderman.

I believe that in this day and age issues are city-wide, regional and complex. Today's issues require broad thinking, the combined resources of multiple layers of government, and the most importantly the ability to act. Minneapolis currently does not have those three elements. The mayor has little power to negotiate with other units of government or to commit city resources. The mayor and city council have to work together consistently and effectively to marshal the funds and staff of the city to any greater purpose. That is a high standard to meet. For the sake of discussion, if we assumed that that consistency and effectiveness existed, then what happens to the objectives of our elected body. Who carries them out? Who is held accountable?

We have a large organization of city employees who need a defined mission and practical direction from the elected body. The manner in which city policy is communicated to

city staff and implemented is haphazard, not purposeful, not accountable. For all intents and purposes, most department directors realize that in practical terms they report to the chairperson of the council committee that oversees their functions, not to a city manager, or not to a mayor that has the requisite powers to coordinate city functions. The result is little coordination and little focused purpose with our hard-earned tax dollars. More importantly, this structure has no tangible accountability in it. Who can I, as a citizen, approach and have a reasonable assurance that my concern can be heard and acted on. Not the mayor. Not my council member. And not any member of the staff. Accountability has to be defined, visible, tangible and simple. That does not exist in today's Minneapolis city government.

I would like to give three examples that I experienced or observed in Minneapolis city government.

My first example is a contract that the city's information technology department had in place during my tenure. The contract was with a company to provide both executive and technical services in that department. The executive services were in the form of a contracted assistant director in charge of technical architecture. The technical services were provided by programmers, system administrators and database administrators, all paid an hourly wage usually four times that of an employee. I submitted a well-researched project, which was reviewed by the assistant director who added extra costs in the form of more technical resources. Those resources would come from the same company that the assistant director worked for. Very simply, the assistant director was managing city resources and directing them to her own company. That company was paid at least three million dollars in about as many years. I asked the city finance officer about this situation. He shrugged his shoulders. I asked the Board of Estimates internal auditor about the propriety of it. He said it was a management issue. The city coordinator eventually met with me. I never heard what transpired. The department director eventually resigned several months later and I believe the company's contract was not renewed. Nevertheless, a lot of money was spent. The question remains. Why was such an obvious conflict of interest allowed to exist?

My second example is about a consultant study requested by the finance officer to make recommendations about the city's equipment fleet and fund which, with its other internal service funds, has been in bad financial condition. The consultant, one with a national reputation, reported that the equipment fleet was too large and contained equipment that should have been rented rather than purchased. It recommended a reduction in fleet size. Two years later, I saw equipment fleet report showing that the fleet size increased rather than decreased. The finance director reports to the city coordinator. The fleet manager reports to the public works director. The city coordinator and the public works director, according to the city charter, are equals. In effect, there was no structural way for this consultant's recommendation to be implemented. Why should this obvious operational gap exist?

My third example comes from an observation during the summer of 2004 when the mayor was formulating a budget. He expressed tremendous regret at having to propose

the layoff of police officers. At the very same moment, the city's website showed a posting for a new city position. It was labelled a "featured job". The city had created a new position for a deputy city coordinator. It would be a new layer of bureaucracy in which highly-paid department directors would no longer report to the city coordinator but to a deputy city coordinator. So, as a citizen, was I to understand that there was no money to fund police officers on the street, but there was money to create a brand new high-costing level of bureaucracy?

My three examples would probably not catch the attention of an investigative news team. I am not suggesting that they involve crime or fraud. Actually, I believe that crime and fraud are rare in government. What is prevalent in government is lack of management and accountability and these actually cost us a lot more than anything criminal or fraudulent. Furthermore, their costs are usually unnoticed and permanent.

Nothing you will suggest as charter changes and no form of city government will be perfect. However, our current form of government is incomprehensible and unaccountable. Government at all levels is as complex as any publicly-held corporation., too complex for most citizens to understand and participate in. Unfortunately, government is not policed by the equivalent of Wall Street analysts who have the expertise to address financial and operational details and call corporations to task for poor performance.

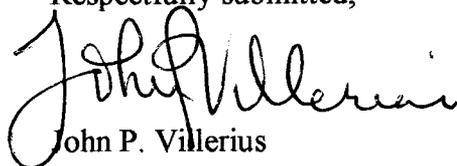
I would guess that many citizens would express some satisfaction with city services. What they might not know but would care about is that the same results that now might be costing \$150 per unit of service could cost only \$100 under a simpler, clearer city structure.

But at the very least, Minneapolis government needs to be simpler, and more accountable. The best analogy I can think of is the child's puzzle: Connect-the-Dots. If a citizens points to any level of city government, he or she should know by following the lines of authority who is responsible, who gets the work done and who can be held accountable if that doesn't happen. That doesn't exist today.

I would suggest that any improvement – meaning lower costing and better services – probably won't materialize unless there is a stronger executive or managerial function either in the form of a strong mayor or a manager-council form of government.

I would also suggest the taxing powers of the four elected bodies provided in the current charter be combined and given to one, the city council, and that the Board of Estimate be dissolved, that the park and library board exist only for policy making.

Respectfully submitted,


John P. Villerius

5/25/05