

DETROIT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
PROPOSAL/ISSUE REVIEW SUMMARY

ISSUE NUMBER: GOS 36

ISSUE CATEGORY: Government Operations & Structure

SOURCE: Janice Harvey, Citizen, 10/13/10 (Website)
Anthony Dicus, Citizen, 10/18/10 (Website)

RELATED CHARTER SECTIONS: Article 9, Ch. 1

RELEVANT ORDINANCE SECTION:

RELEVANT LAW(S):

ISSUE/PROPOSAL STATEMENT: Re-establish Community Advisory Councils

RATIONALE: “[They are] a vital element in goal setting and decision making relating to its area. Impacted residents should be respected much more.” Janice Harvey

ANALYSIS: Language regarding Community Advisory Councils was first included in the 1974 Charter, amended in the 1997 Charter and later repealed on November 3, 1998. The Commentary to both the 1974 and 1997 Charters provides insight into the creation and intended function of the Community Advisory Councils.

1974 Commentary; Article 9, Chapter 1:

Commentary to 9-101 (Definition and Authorization)

This chapter is new. From the middle of the decade of the 1960’s to the present, there has been a growing awareness at all levels of government of the need – not only because of citizen alienation but for reasons of greater efficiency – to bring the control of government and the delivery of services closer to the people. Section 9-101 is an enabling provision which would permit the City to decentralize some governmental functions by ordinance if that were shown to be desirable.

Commentary to 9-102 (Approval of the Voters)

This section assures that the initial decentralization ordinance will not become effective until first approved by a majority of City voters voting on the question.

Commentary to 9-103 (Study Commission)

The decentralization of specified municipal functions is a subject which has received considerable attention and serious study in

other major American cities, particularly New York City.

Many citizens argued to the Charter Revision Commission that Detroit government should be decentralized. It soon became clear to the Commission, however, that decentralization is a subject which requires far more investigation than could adequately be given by the Charter Revision Commission, which was already committed to the immense undertaking of writing an entirely new city charter.

Nevertheless, to assure that this subject is thoroughly studied and fully evaluated, the new charter creates a special commission for that purpose. If the special commission finds that some decentralization of functions is desirable, it is required to prepare an ordinance that would implement such finding. The ordinance will then be submitted to the voters of the City as the commissioner's "initiative" proposal under section 9-103, a procedure similar to that provided generally for initiative measures in article 12 of the new charter.

Commentary to 9-104 (Powers and Duties)

This section serves two purposes. First, it is illustrative of the kinds of functions that could be decentralized. Second, it assures that, if community councils are created, they will have considerable independence in performing functions delegated to them.

1997 Commentary; Article 9, Chapter 1:

Commentary to 9-101 (Definition and Purpose)

This chapter represents an evolution of the original objectives, as stated in this section in the 1974 Charter from an attempt to provide procedures for implementing decentralization of governmental functions, (e.g. creation of sub-units of city government with control over the delivery of city service) to more focused and achievable objectives. The new objectives here will be to maximize citizen understanding of the workings of government and to create a mechanism for citizens to provide input, in the form of advice, into our government entities.

Primary to citizen concerns is the overall performance of city government. The level of enthusiasm for citizen involvement in the determination of how government should conduct its business was demonstrated by the overwhelming support for the charter revision process in the 1993 municipal election. Further, the amount of volunteer and organization energy that is and has always existed in our community strongly suggests there has been and is a major missed opportunity for positive citizen involvement in addressing problems in Detroit.

Section 9-101 is an enabling provision which would permit the city council to establish community advisory council districts by ordinance. These community advisory councils will allow, for the first time, direct structured access to city council members and access to factual information regarding specific community issues. The provisions will allow for the creation of nine (9) equally populated contiguous districts whether the citizens decide to elect city council members city-wide or from districts. The ordinance will be adopted within ninety (90) days to facilitate timely implementation of this section.

Commentary on Section 9-102 (Creation and Composition of Advisory Councils)

This section describes the process for the establishment of community advisory councils. These councils will be established upon petitioned requests from registered and qualified voters of a given district. Members of the newly established councils will be elected by qualified and registered voters from that district at the first election following passage of the ordinance, where law permits. This will be necessary to accommodate the first wave of advisory council creations which will probably occur after scheduled municipal elections. Thereafter, advisory council members of ordinance established councils will be elected to regularly scheduled municipal elections. City council members are required to be a part of community advisory councils to ensure official governmental status and access, and will serve as regular members. City council members will not be allowed to serve as chair of any advisory council.

Commentary on Section 9-103 (Powers, Duties and Limitations)

This section reiterates that city council has the responsibility to draft rules and operating procedures under which community advisory councils will function or cease to function. It also lists very specific powers and duties that must be included.

Community advisory councils should be designed to enhance citizen participation in government and represent neighborhood interest. Properly structured, they will serve as an additional communication and community stabilization resources. Making the community advisory councils “the eyes, ears and voice” to city council on such matters as indicated in this section will certainly increase the potential for this city’s return to its past prominence and lay the groundwork for a new found respect for local government by our citizenry.

DISPOSITION/COMMISSION ACTION:

NOTES: