

City of Vancouver 2024 Charter Review Committee

Meeting #3, December 14, 6-8 pm, Vancouver City Hall, Birch Conference Room

ATTENDEES

Committee members present

Ronald Zito
Lynn Samuels
Cherry Mercado
Mark Meckler
Nelson Holmberg
Russ Beacock
Josh Egan
Terah Ebie
Janet James
Lisa Ghormley
Ben Moll
Janet Landesberg
Mike Pond
Janet James

Members absent

Alicia Cummins
Johnathan DeBellis

Community members

1 Community Member in Attendance

Staff

Ty Stober, Councilmember
Aaron Lande, Policy and Program Manager
Nena Cook, Deputy City Attorney
Kerry Peck, City Manager's Office Administrative Assistant
Tricia Juettemeyer, Assistant City Attorney
Becky Rude, Assistant City Attorney
Ben Duncan, Facilitation Lead
Gillian Garber-Yonts, Tech Support
Maria Verano, Notetaker

MEETING DOCUMENTS

- Meeting agenda
- Presentation
- Charter Committee Worksheet
- Committee Roster

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ben Duncan, Facilitation Lead opened the meeting, and participants introduced themselves, stating their name and affiliation.

AMENDMENTS: COUNCILMEMBER STOBER

Councilmember Ty Stober thanked the Charter Review Committee for their time in the Charter Review process and explained his goal to provide his insights and help inform the process. He provided the following suggestions and challenges for Charter Committee consideration:

The Councilmember brought a document ([linked here](#)) with data for Charter Committee consideration.

- The election is in November 2024, and the Committee can request City Council to delay submitting ballot measures until the next election year, despite timeline requirements.
- Include time for Committee members to review the memo that will be presented to city council.
- The Charter, subject to change every five years, grants city council final say on ballot content, however, people can petition for inclusion via direct petitioning with voters and collecting signatures, as well as through freeholders¹ who may choose to repeal, make changes, or write a new Charter.
- Consider that the city's population was under 50,000 when the current Charter was established, and how the city's population may reach 300,000 by 2026 due to annexation and growth.
- Recommendation to address equity issues differently. For example, an argument was made about the lack of city council representation from other parts of the city, such as east Vancouver.
- Voter turnout and community participation are focal points, and it is expected there will be higher voter turnout this year as is consistent with previous election years.
- Consider the complexity of today's issues and diverse opinions, along with the challenge council members face in balancing duties with full-time jobs.

The following summarizes the Charter Review Committee's discussion on Councilmember Stober's remarks.

- A member raised questions about the city's plan after annexation, including the possibility of districting, and when the Growth Management Plan is to be completed.
 - Councilmember Stober confirmed the Plan is required to be completed by June 30th, 2025.
- Members discussed the uncertainty of the annexation process, with considerations for population increase triggering a reopening of a Charter discussion sooner than five years. It was recommended that the group explore various solutions by discussing the city council's structure, its roles, and voter distribution and turnout.
- Another member highlighted past concerns of weak mayoral leadership and strong city manager form of government.
- A member encouraged the council to communicate their challenges, emphasizing the importance of context.
- One member sought clarification on mayor and council member salaries.
 - Councilmember Stober explained the city's reliance on staff and that the Commission is responsible for setting wages.
- Another member expressed concerns regarding annexation and the outdated data on the city's website. They expressed the need for an open and well-defined process regarding annexation.

¹ Holding a freeholder election is another way to amend the City Charter. That election is when the voters of a first class city elect individuals to adopt or revise an existing charter pursuant to RCW 35.22.050 [RCW 35.22.050: Election of freeholders to frame charter. \(wa.gov\)](https://www.wa.gov).

CHARTER REVIEW TIMELINE AND AGENDA REVIEW

Ben presented the Charter Review timeline and reminded Committee members they are in the stage of eliciting input from community members, and Committee members will soon deliberate the issues presented by the community.

He reviewed the agenda ([linked here](#) on the City of Vancouver website) and shared the following Meeting #3 objectives.

- Recap and reflection on Charter Review Committee Meeting #2
- Introduction of City Proposed Amendments
- Introduction of Community Proposed Amendments
- Discussion and deliberation of amendments
- Identification of any edits, concerns, and agreement

Decision: The Charter Review Committee members approved Meeting #2 minutes.

Meeting #2 Reflections

- The Committee had a robust discussion about gender-neutral language, specifically regarding terms like “policeman” and “firemen”. The Deputy City Attorney reported that deletion of terms related to the masculine and feminine genders is an administrative process, and the City Attorney approved the changes to section 7.04; the City Clerk will make those updates to the Charter.
- A member shared the importance of being concise with recommendations moving forward noting that any proposed amendments will go to the voters.

DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTION OF CITY PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The City Attorney's office reviewed the Charter and made proposed changes to two sections.

Proposed Amendment: Delete Section 11.05 (Amendment shown on slide 13 of the Charter Review Meeting #3 [Slide Deck](#))

Assistant City Attorney Tricia Juettemeyer presented the proposed change to delete section 11.05 from the Charter in its entirety.

The following summarizes the Charter Review Committee’s discussion on the proposed amendment.

- A member noted that deals exceeding five years have been happening already, and it was confirmed by the Assistant City Attorney there are current agreements existing beyond five years, that are still subject to city council approval.
- Ben highlighted that contracts over an initial \$300,000, with future increases over 10%, need to be approved by the city council.
- It was emphasized that the current section creates unnecessary administrative burdens and costs, involving additional steps.
- A member inquired about the historical record of the section’s inclusion.
- Another member raised the question about safeguarding against long-term contracts, including involving family members.

- Assistant City Attorney Juettemeyer explained a competitive sealed proposal process for contracts that range from \$50,000 - \$300,000 is required, in addition to a fair bidding process.
- **Action:** Charter Committee to provide additional questions on the rationale of the proposed change in their worksheet, including the question regarding safeguards to avoid non-transparent, long-term contracts that may fly under the radar.

Proposed Amendment: Change to Section 2.18d (Amendment shown on slide 14 of the Charter Review Meeting #3 [Slide Deck](#))

Assistant City Attorney Becky Rude presented the proposed change to Section 2.18d Citizens' Commission on Mayor/City Council Salaries.

The following summarizes the Charter Review Committee's discussion on the proposed amendment.

- A member questioned the shift from the specific Consumer Price Index (CPI) to a less specific term.
 - Assistant City Attorney Rude explained they are open to refinements and highlighted the aim to align the charter with how the city adjusts fees and charges, maintaining consistency with the Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC), as indicated in a recent January 1, 2023, ordinance.
- Another member suggested tying the proposal to the process used for standard pay increases for city employees.
 - Assistant City Attorney Rude explained there is no standard way of increasing employee salaries within the city due to various employee classifications and union contracts.
- Concern was shared by a member about attaching language to the VMC and questioned potential confusion if future changes occurred in the VMC.
 - Assistant City Attorney Rude clarified they are not citing a specific VMC and are trying to be consistent with the CPI approach (using external economic indicators). Any changes in the VMC should not affect the proposed language, ensuring alignment with the city's established CPI.

DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY-PROPOSED EDITS

Ben Duncan introduced the next agenda item and invited community member Leah Perkel to provide their community-proposed edits. Leah suggested the Committee consider shifting from at-large, city-wide representation to a district form of representation, citing a lack of geographic representation in eastern and central parts of the city.

The following summarizes the Charter Review Committee's discussion on the community proposed edits.

- A suggestion was made to Leah to provide specific language for the proposed change and explore how many first-class cities do not have district-based representation.
- Members shared concerns about geographic representation and questioned how to ensure equity across different districts.

- Members highlighted the potential barriers to running for office including potential high associated costs, and salary concerns. A member noted that council member salaries could potentially inhibit new people from running.
- The balance between council members' salaries and expanding their role was considered, taking into account the part-time nature of their positions. Population growth and scalability of the system were raised as potential challenges.
- A member suggested comparing salaries of first-class cities with weak mayoral leadership and strong city manager forms of government.
- A member highlighted the need for better connections between neighborhood engagement and city representation.
- Members discussed the frequency of discussions about central and eastern representation and noted that the City of Portland recently transitioned to districts.
- A member asked the Committee to consider the projected population growth and evaluate whether it makes sense to have part-time counselors.
- The role of the salary commission was discussed, questioning how much authority the Committee has compared to the commission, and it was clarified that this Committee writes the language that the commission follows.
- It was discussed to build time in the agendas for deliberative discussions and to hear from the community.
- A member shared that the Committee's January materials will include all proposals, including non-approved ones, from the 2019 Charter Review process, there will be another opportunity for community input, and the Committee can soon begin deliberations.

PUBLIC COMMENT/COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Ben opened the floor for public comment. There was one member of the public in attendance. No public comments were shared.

NEXT STEPS

Ben Duncan shared that the next meeting is scheduled for January 23, 5-7 pm and reminded the Committee members to complete the Meeting #3 reflections form and spread the word with community members of the upcoming public input opportunities.

Aaron Lande reviewed the upcoming city council dates and emphasized that members mark their calendars with these dates:

- April 8 - Interim update on Charter Review Committee work
- May 20 - Final recommendations from Charter Review Committee
- June 3 – Public hearing on final recommendations and City Council vote

Aaron also presented the opportunity for interested Committee members to co-present with him to City Council.

CLOSING REMARKS

Aaron thanked the Committee members for their time. The meeting was adjourned.