

City of Vancouver 2024 Charter Review Committee

January Meeting, January 23, 5-7 pm, Vancouver City Hall, Aspen Conference Room

ATTENDEES

Committee members present

Johnathan DeBellis
Lynn Samuels
Mark Meckler
Nelson Holmberg
Russ Beacock
Josh Egan
Terah Ebie
Janet James
Lisa Ghormley
Ron Zito
Janet Landesberg
Mike Pond
Janet James

Members absent

Alicia Cummins
Ben Moll
Cherry Mercado

Community members

1 Community Member in Attendance

Staff

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

MEETING DOCUMENTS

- Meeting agenda
- Presentation
- Charter Committee Worksheet
- Committee Roster
- Summary of 2024 Issues to Date

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

CHARTER REVIEW TIMELINE AND AGENDA REVIEW

Ben presented the Charter Review timeline and reminded Committee members they will have the opportunity to deliberate the issues presented to date as well as share new ideas during the meeting.

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

- Recap and reflection on December Charter Review Committee Meeting
- Introduction of Community Proposed Amendments
- Discussion and deliberation of amendments

- Assessment of any edits, concerns and agreement

DECEMBER MEETING REFLECTIONS

- A member shared feedback that some of the topics shown on the Proposed Amendments have been proposed during previous committee processes. They shared concern that there could be potential voter fatigue if the same issues are proposed again.
- A member shared that Section 11.05 was amended in 2014. They asked whether the amended language was effective.
 - Nena Cook, Deputy City Attorney informed the group that the language referencing a required ordinance was stricken due to the addition of protections in the VMC that were not in place during the previous Charter Committee process.
- One member asked whether the group will be looking at external examples. Last charter review cycle, the Mayor of Camas came to speak on a few proposals.
 - The project team shared that committee members can make those requests. The committee members can also make their own inquiry.
- One member asked whether it would be possible to acquire Clark County GIS data showing what various districting options could look like.
 - The project team shared that committee members can make that request if they would like.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The following summarizes the problems and proposals for additional Charter amendments shared by the Committee members.

Annexation

- Problem: The City of Vancouver residents do not have sufficient say in the annexation process.
- Proposal: Add language to the Charter that states whether annexation would need to be approved by vote or by City Council.

Discussion

- A committee member asked what the decision-making process for annexation is.
 - The project team shared that the City Council is granted authority to make annexation decisions for community members served by City of Vancouver water and sewer. Annexation is available a number of ways under state law, i.e direct vote of the people, interlocal agreement, action by council, among others. Annexation by Charter is not allowable under state law.
- One member shared that on the City website there is an annexation page that has in-depth information and may be a good resource.
- One member asked whether this might be outlined in the growth management act that could supersede any language added to the Charter.
- Project team will do additional research on annexation to clarify the existing rules and relationship to the Charter Review Committee's work.

Signatures for Petition

- Problem: The requirement of petitions signatures to be signed in ink is limiting given the availability of electronic signature collection technology.

- Proposal: Amend the charter to allow for petition signatures to be collected electronically.

Discussion

- Nena Cook shared that Section 10.03 of the Charter references petition papers being circulated and that the Charter Committee can open the topic for discussion. Nena added that one community member is currently interested in circulating a petition.

Councilmember Staff or Aides

- Problem: Not every Councilmember is able to contribute as much time to council work.
- Proposal: Provide staff resources for City Councilmembers.

Discussion

- A Committee member shared concern that councilmembers do not have staff or aides, which limits the productivity of council.

Councilmember Pay

- Problem: The lack of a full-time livable wage for councilmembers limits which community members can viably serve on the council, impacting diversity of candidates.
- Proposal: Look at the Salary Commission and see what their process for adjusting and deciding Councilmember salaries is.

Discussion

- One committee member shared that the issue is around whether councilmember pay is fair compensation for the amount of work that is required by the size of the job. The committee member suggested the committee consider requiring a review of whether the job has grown and whether that means compensation should be adjusted.
- The project team informed the Committee that the Vancouver Councilmember positions are part time and salaried. Several of the Councilmembers have full time jobs outside of their council duties.
- One committee member shared concern that income could be a barrier to some community members running for City Council.
- One committee member shared that adjusting the councilmember position to full time could have broader implications, including the potential change in the role of City Council
- A committee member responded that CoP wanted a thriving wage for council members based on the MIT thriving wage calculator.
- A committee member shared that there is a salary review commission and that the group should be cautious of usurping their authority.

Mechanism for Obsolete Language Updates

- Problem: There is obsolete language in the charter.
- Proposal: Look at the powers granted to the City Clerk, the City Manager, and the City Attorney and adjust them to include removing obsolete charter language.

Discussion:

- One committee member shared that there were obsolete references in the charter including previous salaries.

- Nena shared that the power for the City Clerk to make gendered language changes is in the charter. She shared that expanded powers could be given to the City Clerk, the City Attorney, or the City Manager.

RESOLVED PROPOSALS

Ben presented the two resolved proposals.

7.04 Relief and Pensions

- **Decision:** The Charter Committee unanimously voted to remove the proposed amendment to section 7.04 from consideration.

11.11 Oaths

- The City clarified that the City Manager shared that the proposed language would result in an inappropriate expansion of the Police Chiefs authority. The Charter Committee is welcome to champion the amendment if they would like.
- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted 12 to 1 to remove the amendment to section 11.11 from consideration.

ACTIVE PROPOSALS

Ben presented the three active proposals.

2.18 D – Citizen’s Commission on Mayor/City Council Salaries

- One committee member shared that the Salary Commission determines the salary increase.
- One committee member shared concern about the language referring to the VMC.
- A member shared that the amendment is meant to align the salary commission process with the City process.
- Nena shared that there are other places in the VMC that use a CPI index which varies by region and month. If we strike the language, we could have the salary commission and the City using different inflation rates.
- A committee member asked whether this expands the powers of the City Clerk. Nena shared that it is a process involving the CFO and the City Manager. They decide on a CPI index that is applied uniformly to ensure that fees and expenses don't vary.
- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment to section 2.18 D.

11.05 Contract Beyond One Year

- One Committee member suggested that the language be amended to include a requirement that the City Council approve any contracts lasting longer than five years.
- One member shared that this is a decision on trust.
 - Ben clarified that the ordinance was an administrative burden.
 - Nena shared that the deletion came from the City Attorney’s office. The ordinance language isn't what makes this cumbersome. Other protections have been put in place since 2019.
- A community member asked where the oversight is for contracts lasting longer than five years.
 - Nena shared that it is in the procurement process.
- The project team shared that municipal code governs the competitive process. Changes to the VMC go before City Council. State law dictates the competitive bid process.

- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted 6 to 5 (2 abstentions) to continue deliberations on the amendment to section 11.05.

3.03 Powers and Duties

- The city shared that the city manager provides regular administrative updates.
- One committee member shared that the city manager is given that responsibility.
- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted 12 to 1 to approve the amendment to section 3.03.

STRAW POLL ON INTEREST IN ADDITIONAL AMENDMENTS

Ben introduced the outstanding amendments and asked the charter committees to share their interest in moving forward the topics for continued deliberations. The following topics were approved for further discussion.

Annexation

- Proposed Solution: Allow Vancouver residents to vote on any annexation proposal.

Signatures for Petition

- Proposed Solution: Allow petition signatures to be collected electronically.

Districting

- Proposed Solution: Shift the City of Vancouver from at-large city-wide representation to a district form of representation.

Voter Cycles

- Proposed Solution: Shift the election cycle for City Council.

Council Staff or Aides

- Proposed Solution: Provide staff support for City Councilmembers.

Councilmember Pay

- Proposed Solution: Adjust the salary commission's charge to include assessing the role and responsibility of City Councilmembers and setting FTE compensation for the position of Councilmember.

Size of City Council

- Proposed Solution: Increase the number of City Councilmembers.

Mechanism for Obsolete Language Updates

- Proposed Solution: Adjust the City Clerk, City Manager, or City Attorney's powers to clean up obsolete language outside of the Charter Review process under section 11.1a.

PUBLIC COMMENT/COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Ben opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were shared.

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

One committee member shared that districting is a passion interest. They asked whether it is appropriate to form a smaller working group of the committee to focus on a major issue. Aaron noted

that the committee is allowed to form subcommittees provided that they are compliant with public meeting law.

- A committee member asked whether the topic being discussed by a subcommittee could be opened to community members. Nena shared that those paths would have to be kept separate. This Charter Committee is comprised of residents.

Nena shared that the charge of the committee is to propose language that would go to city council. The other option is to circulate a petition to the voters. Amendments approved by the Charter Committee will go through legal review to develop ballot language.

Ben Duncan shared that the next meeting is scheduled for February 27, 4-6 pm and reminded the Committee members to complete the January Committee Meeting reflections form and spread the word with community members of the upcoming public input opportunities.

CLOSING REMARKS

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