

Governmental Structure Subcommittee King County Charter Review Commission

Summary of Issues and Amendment Proposals

Partisanship

The question of whether the County Executive, Council, and Assessor should be partisan or nonpartisan offices has been debated for years without giving the public a chance to vote on it. It was part of the original recommendation from the King County/Metro merger. The 1996-1997 Charter Review Commission took this issue up but no Council Action was taken.

Currently, over a dozen citizens and elected officials raised the issue of partisanship during our public outreach efforts. Most of the issues came from private citizens promoting non-partisan County elected positions. However, Councilmember Larry Phillips and King County Executive Ron Sims are in favor of retaining partisan elected positions. This issues warrant further attention.

Initiative Process

There were a total of 17 issues regarding the initiative process. Most of the issues surrounding the initiative process deal with clarifying the State's Supreme Court's decision to allow the charter to be amended by initiative. Some citizens favored the initiative process, some did not. Others thought there shouldn't be an initiative process because a charter amendment should be difficult to amend. However, most people including King County Executive Ron Sims, and the Municipal League think that there needs to be more clarity around the language and implementation process. The 1996-1997 Charter Review Commission tried to establish an Initiative Process through the citizen initiative process with a 20% signature threshold, but a vote in the Committee of the Whole failed to move it to the full Council.

Elected/Appointed Officials

- This issue of elected/appointed officials has been a very contentious issue. Close to 20 citizens commented on whether or not the County Elections Director should be elected or appointed with mixed reactions. Additionally, 14 comments were made on whether or not the sheriff should be elected or appointed, also with mixed reaction. These issues certainly warrant further examination.

CRC Recommendation Process

A number of former and current elected officials advocate that CRC recommendations go directly to the voters. These officials include King County Executive Ron Sims. The League of Women Voters also supports this potential charter recommendation. This issue should be extensively discussed in subcommittee proceedings.

Instant Runoff Voting/Preference Voting

15 citizens have given input on the idea of an Instant Runoff or Preference Voting electoral system in King County. Some are in favor and some are opposed. This system has recently been adopted in Pierce County. It warrants further review and attention.