

2007-08 CHARTER ISSUE SUMMARY

King County Library System

Issue subject: The King County Library System (KCLS) is one of the largest circulating libraries in the United States. During public meetings, patrons of the KCLS voiced several concerns about KCLS governance structure and operations, including lack of oversight and accountability, an unengaged and unresponsive board of trustees, limited public access to board decision-making processes and lack of planning. The Charter Review Commission (CRC) is limited in its ability to address these and other concerns through the charter. Should the CRC address these concerns by submitting letters to Council, the Executive Office, and the KCLS Board of Trustees making recommendations specific to each entity's ability to make changes that will improve the KCLS?

Issue raised by: Representatives of the Ad Hoc Group of Library System Patrons spoke at seven of the public meetings that the CRC held in June and July 2007. Representatives of this group have followed closely the status of CRC deliberations on KCLS issues.

Description of issue: Commissioners determined that the charter was not the appropriate means by which to affect changes to improve the KCLS. Given the value of the KCLS to the county and the level of public interest in ensuring that KCLS serves library patrons, commissioners agreed that the issue warranted action to address three primary problems:

1. Lack of broad representation, expertise, and useful subcommittee deliberations (state law mandates appointment of too few trustees)
2. Lack of broad representation geographically of areas served by KCLS (Executive Office outreach for identifying trustee nominees is limited)
3. Lack of accountability and transparency (Board of Trustees limits public access to deliberations)

Summary of recommendations: Amendments to the charter are unlikely to meaningfully affect these issues. The CRC recognizes that KCLS' authority and responsibility is governed predominately by state statute. Nevertheless, the CRC believes that it has a duty to recommend actions that will improve the KCLS to those who can implement them: King County Council, King County Executive Office, and the KCLS Board of Trustees.

Suggested recommendations: Communicated in a letter to each of the following:

King County Council. CRC recommends that the King County Council include on the County Council's 2008 legislative agenda a proposal to amend RCW 27.12.190 to require larger library systems to have at least seven trustees on their governance boards. Having a greater number of trustees on the KCLS board would facilitate broader patron representation, expand library system expertise, and help address concerns about appropriately sized subcommittees.

King County Executive Office. The CRC recommends that the Executive Office's process of nominating trustees to serve on the KCLS Board of Trustees provide for greater outreach in order to broaden representation of the geographic areas served by the KCLS. In assigning to Council the ability to confirm executive appointments, Charter Section 340.40 is intended to provide the necessary check to the Executive's power. Therefore, the CRC recommends that, as the Council

deliberates on the Executive's KCLS trustee appointments, it consider the importance of a Board of Trustees that is broadly representative of the KCLS service area.

KCLS Board of Trustees. The CRC recommends that the current KCLS Board of Trustees adopt procedural policies that ensure all full board and subcommittee meetings are open to the public irrespective of whether there is a quorum. This openness includes notifying the public in advance of meeting times and subject matter and making publicly available all materials produced for and as a result of the meetings. Regardless of legal arguments that call for a less publicly accessible approach, greater openness will help allay many of the existing public concerns about accountability and transparency.

Recommendation: Send attached recommendation letters to the indicated entities.

Reference documents:

- Presentation to the Charter Review Commission of King County by the Ad Hoc Group of King County Library System Patrons, June 26, 2007.
- Recommendation for Nomination and appointment - procedures, considerations for the King County Library System Board of Trustees, December 28, 2007.
- Letter to CRC from King County Council, December 17, 2007.

Instructions for submitting recommendations: Concurrent with presentation of the 2007-2008 CRC report to Council, transmit letters to Council, the Executive Office, and the KCLS Board of Trustees making recommendations, as indicated above.



King County

Ron Sims
King County Executive

701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3210
Seattle, WA 98104
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May XX, 2008

Board of Trustees
King County Library System
960 Newport Way NW
Issaquah, WA 98027

Dear Trustees:

The 2007-08 Charter Review Commission (CRC) thanks the King County Library System (KCLS) Board of Trustees for participating in our discussions regarding the library system and the concerns of its patrons. Commissioners are particularly grateful for the participation of Jessica Bonebright and Judge Richard Eadie at our subcommittee's meeting on October 29, 2007. As you know, at that meeting, Commissioners heard from representatives of the Ad Hoc Group of King County Library System patrons, King County Executive Ron Sims' representative Rick Ybarra, and the KCLS Board.

As a result of those discussions and our consideration of information obtained over the course of the CRC's public outreach campaign, we have made several important observations regarding proposed Charter revisions involving the KCLS. The CRC has concluded that public concerns over the workings of the KCLS and its Board of Trustees are likely to be best addressed by recognizing the following:

1. The need for a greater number of Board members to ensure adequate expertise, sufficient numbers to facilitate subcommittee deliberations, and broader representation of King County residents served by the KCLS;
2. The need for a more deliberate board selection outreach process in order to establish a Board of Trustees that is representative geographically of KCLS patrons countywide; and

3. The need for public access to all meetings of the Board of Trustees and its subcommittees in order to reduce concerns about a lack of open decision-making and accountability.

We recognize that the County Charter does not have a significant role in addressing these matters given that KCLS' authority and responsibility is predominately governed by state statute. CRC members nevertheless believe that addressing these concerns is significant to the residents of King County. To that end, the CRC is issuing recommendations to the King County Council, the King County Executive Office and the King County Library Board of Trustees as part of the CRC's 2008 Charter review.

First, the CRC recommends that the County Council's 2008 legislative agenda include a proposal to amend RCW 27.12.190 to require larger library systems to have at least seven trustees on their governance boards. Having a greater number of trustees would facilitate broader patron representation, expand library system expertise, and help address concerns about appropriately sized subcommittees.

Second, the CRC recommends that the Executive Office's process of nominating trustees to serve on the KCLS Board of Trustees undertake greater outreach in order to provide for broader representation from geographic areas served by the KCLS.

Finally, the CRC respectfully recommends to you, members of the KCLS Board of Trustees, adopt procedural policies to ensure all full board and subcommittee meetings are open to the public irrespective of whether there is a quorum. This openness includes notifying the public in advance of meeting times and subject matter and making publicly available all materials produced for and as a result of the meetings. Regardless of whether legal arguments could be made to defend a less publicly accessible approach, greater openness will help allay many of the existing public concerns about accountability and transparency.

It is readily apparent to the Charter Review Commissioners that KCLS officials, the King County Ad Hoc Group of Library Patrons, and elected and appointed officials from whom the CRC heard comments are extraordinarily dedicated to ensuring that the KCLS continues to be one of the most outstanding library systems in the country. We urge your continued work towards this overriding goal and sincerely thank you for your exceptional service.

Sincerely,

Mike Lowry
Co-Chair
2007-08 Charter Review Commission

Lois North
Co-Chair
2007-08 Charter Review Commission

Cc: Bill Ptacek, Director, King County Library System
King County Council
King County Executive Ron Sims
Ad Hoc Group of the King County Library System Patrons



King County

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May XX, 2008

The Honorable Ron Sims
King County Executive
Columbia Center
701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3210
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Executive Sims:

The 2007-08 Charter Review Commission (CRC) thanks you for sending your representative, Rick Ybarra, to participate in our Regional Governance Subcommittee's meeting on October 29, 2007. At that meeting, we discussed the King County Library System (KCLS) and the concerns of its patrons. Commissioners heard from representatives of the Ad Hoc Group of KCLS patrons, representatives of the KCLS Board, and Mr. Ybarra.

As a result of those discussions and our consideration of information obtained over the course of the CRC's public outreach campaign, we have made several important observations regarding proposed Charter revisions involving the KCLS. The CRC has concluded that public concerns over the workings of the KCLS and its Board of Trustees will most effectively be addressed by recognizing the following:

1. The need for a greater number of board members in order to ensure adequate expertise, sufficient numbers to facilitate subcommittee deliberations, and broader representation of King County residents served by the KCLS;
2. The need for a more deliberate board selection outreach process in order to establish a Board of Trustees that is representative geographically of KCLS patrons countywide; and
3. The need for public access to all meetings of the board and its subcommittees in order to address concerns about accountability.

We recognize that the County Charter does not have a significant role in addressing these matters given that KCLS' authority and responsibility is predominately governed by state statute. We nevertheless believe that addressing these concerns is significant to the residents of King County. To that end, the CRC is issuing recommendations to the King County Executive Office, King County Council, and the King County Library Board of Trustees as part of the CRC's 2008 Charter review submittal.

First, the CRC recommends that the process for KCLS trustee appointment provide for greater outreach in order to broaden representation of the geographic areas served by the KCLS. We respectfully recommend that you institute such a process that will guide Executive Office KCLS trustee appointments now and in the future.

Second, the CRC recommends that the County Council's 2008 legislative agenda include a proposal to amend RCW 27.12.190 to require larger library systems to have at least seven trustees on their governance boards. Having a greater number of trustees on the KCLS board would facilitate broader patron representations, expand library system expertise, and help address concerns about appropriately sized subcommittees.

Finally, the CRC recommends that the current KCLS Board of Trustees adopt procedural policies that ensure all full board and subcommittee meetings are open to the public irrespective of whether there is a quorum. This openness includes notifying the public in advance of meeting times and subject matter and making publicly available all materials produced for and as a result of the meetings. Regardless of legal arguments that call for a less publicly accessible approach, greater openness will help allay many of the existing public concerns about accountability and transparency.

It is readily apparent to the Charter Review Commissioners that KCLS officials, the King County Ad Hoc Group of Library Patrons, and elected and appointed officials from whom the CRC heard comments are extraordinarily dedicated to ensuring that the KCLS continues to be one of the outstanding library systems in the country. We want to urge your support of this overriding goal and sincerely thank you for your attention to the concerns of KCLS patrons.

Sincerely,

Mike Lowry
Co-Chair
2007-08 Charter Review Commission

Lois North
Co-Chair
2007-08 Charter Review Commission

Cc: Bill Ptacek, Director, King County Library System
King County Councilmembers
Board of Trustees, King County Library System
Ad Hoc Group of the King County Library System Patrons



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Ron Sims

King County Executive

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May XX, 2008

Metropolitan King County Council
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104-3272

Dear Councilmembers:

The 2007-08 Charter Review Commission (CRC) thanks the Council in advance for taking under consideration the CRC's formal recommendations for changes to the King County Charter. Among the issues to which the CRC gave full consideration were concerns raised by patrons of the King County Library System (KCLS). These included the following:

1. The need for a greater number of board members in order to ensure adequate expertise, sufficient numbers to facilitate subcommittee deliberations, and broader representation of King County residents served by the KCLS;
2. The need for a more deliberate process of board selection outreach in order to establish a Board of Trustees that is representative geographically of KCLS patrons countywide; and
3. The need for public access to all meetings of the board and its subcommittees in order to address concerns about accountability.

We recognize that the King County Charter does not have a significant role in addressing these matters given that KCLS' authority and responsibility is predominately governed by state statute. We nevertheless believe that addressing these concerns is significant to the residents of King County. To that end, the CRC is issuing recommendations to the King County Council, the King County Executive Office and the King County Library Board of Trustees as part of the CRC's 2008 Charter review submittal.

First, the CRC respectfully recommends that you, members of the King County Council, include on the County Council's 2008 legislative agenda a proposal to amend RCW 27.12.190 to require larger library systems to have at least seven trustees on their governance boards. Having a greater number of trustees on the KCLS board would facilitate broader patron representation, expand library system expertise, and help address concerns about appropriately sized subcommittees.

Second, the CRC recommends that the Executive Office's process of nominating trustees to serve on the KCLS Board of Trustees provide for greater outreach in order to broaden representation of the geographic areas served by the KCLS. As part of this process, the CRC recommends that, as the Council deliberates on its confirmation of Executive appointed KCLS trustees, it consider the importance of a Board that is broadly representative of the KCLS service area.

Finally, the CRC recommends that the current KCLS Board of Trustees adopt procedural policies that ensure all full board and subcommittee meetings are open to the public irrespective of whether there is a quorum. This openness includes notifying the public in advance of meeting times and subject matter and making publicly available all materials produced for and as a result of the meetings. Regardless of whether legal arguments can be made to defend a less publicly accessible approach, greater openness will help allay many of the existing public concerns about accountability and transparency.

It is readily apparent to the Charter Review Commissioners that KCLS officials, the King County Ad Hoc Group of Library Patrons, and elected and appointed officials from whom the CRC heard comments are extraordinarily dedicated to ensuring that the KCLS continues to be one of the outstanding library systems in the country. We want to urge your support of this overriding goal and sincerely thank you for your attention to the concerns of KCLS patrons.

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