

DRAFT: City of Vancouver 2024 Charter Review Committee

April Meeting, April 23, 4-6pm, Vancouver City Hall, Aspen Conference Room

ATTENDEES

Committee members present

Jonathan DeBellis
Mark Meckler
Nelson Holmberg
Russ Beacock
Josh Egan
Terah Ebie
Janet James
Lisa Ghormley
Janet Landesberg
Mike Pond
Cherry Bisquera

Members absent

Alicia Cummins
Ben Moll
Ron Zito
Lynn Samuels

Community members

No community members 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

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 informed the group that during the meeting they will be asked to vote on proposed charter amendment recommendations to the Vancouver City Council.

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

- Finalize and confirm Charter Committee's four proposed amendments.

MARCH 2024 MEETING MINUTES

- A Committee member moved to approve the March Meeting Minutes. Another Committee member seconded the motion.
 - **Decision:** The March 2024 Vancouver Charter Review Committee Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved.

CONFIRMATION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Ben Duncan asked the subcommittee leads to share their April 15 Council Workshop reflections and updated proposed amendment language.

Districing

The Districing Subcommittee co-lead shared that City Council responded negatively to their proposed amendment framing. They provided an overview of a refined framing approach for the Committee's consideration which included the following.

- The proposed amendment language will remain unchanged.
- Districing proposed as a best practice by the [Model City Charter 9th Edition – 2021](#) (National Civic League).
- The City of Vancouver is growing to become the second largest city in Washington.
- Due to the demographics of Vancouver, it would not be possible to draw a district with a majority minority population.
- The benefits of single member districts.
- The risk of a Voting Rights Act lawsuit if a district form of representation is not adopted.
- The identification of potential pitfalls of a mixed system.
- The Model City Charter recommends a mix of districts and at large seats.

The Districing Subcommittee lead noted that there were two councilmembers that shared that they were in favor of districing and two councilmembers who had not yet made a decision on districts. The Mayor and one absent councilmember did not share their leaning regarding districts.

Discussion

- A committee member shared that this is the third time districing has been proposed by a Charter Committee and noted the importance of highlighting the diversity, equity, and inclusion benefits.
 - The Subcommittee co-lead shared their belief that the demographics will not change drastically enough to change the Subcommittee's findings.
 - The Subcommittee lead shared that district candidates would run in their districts for the primary and general election. The Districing Subcommittee will look to find data contrasting the cost to run city-wide and district campaigns.
- A committee member noted that Council took issue with the idea of districing before the annexation of unincorporated lands into the City of Vancouver takes place.
 - The Subcommittee lead shared that they opted to omit a triggering event in their proposal due to unpredictability.

- The Subcommittee co-lead shared that given the annexation timeline, they would recommend another charter committee weigh in on the need for additional councilmembers.
- A committee member shared that they oppose the proposed amendment and that they do not believe districts guarantee improvements to diversity, equity and inclusion. They added that they have not seen a city-wide push for districts and that they agreed with the concerns shared by the City Attorney and City Manager.

A committee member moved to approve the proposed Districting amendment. Another committee member seconded the motion.

Continued Discussion

- A committee member shared that the City of Vancouver is outgrowing the small city model and noted the expense of mounting a city-wide campaign.
- A committee member shared that districting is a means of modernizing the City of Vancouver election process.
- A committee member shared concern that the proposal would not land well with Council and noted the cautionary presentations shared by the City Manager and the City Attorney. They added that they did not hear a compelling argument for districting.
- A committee member shared that they do not believe districting will make a difference and that district representation would not ensure equitable representation on Council.
- A committee member shared that they would like to see the issue go to a vote.
- A committee member shared concern regarding voter fatigue and the ability of districts to increase DEI representation on Council.
- A committee member shared that they would like to see data to support the districting argument.
- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted 6-5 to approve the proposed districting amendment.

Signatures for Petition

The Signatures for Petition Subcommittee lead shared that City Council responded positively to their proposed amendment framing. They provided the following update.

- The City Council's feedback centered around the question of whether or not the proposed amendment would immediately result in the acceptance of electronic signatures.
- The City Clerk would still need to approve the acceptance of electronic signatures for them to be deemed legitimate. The City Council asked for language that clarifies this distinction.
- The subcommittee decided to omit additional language due to the risk of complication.
- The Subcommittee suggests that additional edits be made to capitalize "City Clerk" throughout the section.

A committee member moved to approve the proposed Signatures for Petition amendment. Another committee member seconded the motion.

- **Decision:** The proposed Signatures for Petition amendment was unanimously approved.

Councilmember Pay

The Councilmember Pay Subcommittee lead shared that City Council responded mostly positively to their proposed amendment but posed some questions about the framing. They provided the following update.

- Councilmember Stober shared that it would be helpful to gauge community input on the proposed amendment.
- The Subcommittee lead clarified that the amendment is not increasing councilmember pay, but codifying direction to the Salary Review Commission.

A committee member moved to approve the proposed Councilmember Pay amendment. Another committee member seconded the motion.

Discussion

- A committee member shared concerns regarding voter fatigue.
- A committee member shared that allowing the Charter Committee to meet prior to the Salary Review Commission may be helpful.
- A committee member shared that adding this direction to the Salary Review Commission into the charter creates a legal obligation.
- A committee member shared that they wish the amendment had a stronger commitment.
- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted 7-4 to reject the proposed Councilmember Pay amendment.

Inclusive Language Updates

The Inclusive Language Updates Subcommittee lead shared that City Council responded positively to their proposed amendment framing. Nena Cook, Deputy City Attorney, shared that a small update was made to align the language with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A committee member moved to approve the proposed Inclusive Language Updates amendment. Another committee member seconded the motion.

Discussion

- **Decision:** The Charter Committee voted unanimously to approve the proposed Inclusive Language Updates amendment.

PUBLIC COMMENT/COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

None.

PREP FOR MAY 20 COUNCIL WORKSHOP

Aaron Lande shared that the Council Workshop is scheduled for May 20 and asked the Subcommittee leads to share updates on the Charter Committee approved amendments. The Committee members discussed the order for presentations and confirmed presenters.

Nena Cook shared a reading of the six Charter Committee approved amendments. Aaron reminded the group that the Council decision on the full list of proposed amendments will be made at the June 3 Council Meeting. He shared that there will be an opportunity for public comment at the meeting.

CLOSING REMARKS

Ben thanked the group for their thoughtful deliberations. Aaron thanked the committee members for their commitment to the Charter Review process and invited them to participate in future opportunities with the City of Vancouver. Nena Cook reminded the committee members of additional opportunities for adding proposed charter amendment language to the ballot. The meeting was adjourned.

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