

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 42

**City of Minneapolis  
Amendments to Charter  
Re: Terms of Office**

**April 19, 1955**



CITIZENS LEAGUE  
601 Syndicate Bldg.  
Minneapolis 2, Minn.

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EXPLANATION OF THE LEAGUE'S POSITION IN SUPPORT OF  
CHARTER AMENDMENTS PROPOSED BY THE LEAGUE'S BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS TO THE CHARTER COMMISSION ON APRIL 14, 1955

I. Amendment on terms of aldermen, Mayor, Comptroller, City  
Treasurer

The proposal reads:

Chapter 2 of the Charter of the City of Minneapolis is hereby amended effective on and after January 1, 1957 by amending Section 3 to read as follows:

"Section 3. The terms of office of the Mayor, City Treasurer, City Comptroller and aldermen shall be four years commencing on the first Monday of July of the year of their election.";

by striking sections 4 and 6 and renumbering sections 5 and 7 through 21 in numerical sequence starting with number 4.

What would it do?

It would increase the terms of the aldermen, Mayor, City Treasurer and City Comptroller from two years to four years. All these officials would be elected at the same time and would serve concurrent terms. Thus the aldermen would have four year, non-staggered terms.

Why four year, non-staggered terms for aldermen?

The League believes that the present two-year term results in aldermen having to devote too much time and money to campaigning for reelection. In favoring non-staggering of aldermanic terms, the League feels that if the entire Council is up for election at one time, the attention of the electorate would be more easily centered on city-wide issues, with less concentration on ward issues. Also there would be less likelihood of buck-passing and the City's business would play second fiddle to the election only once every 4 years instead of every 2 years.

Here are the pros and cons of four year terms in more detail:

For the four year terms:

1. More likely to attract and hold qualified candidates for the office.
2. Provides more time for an alderman to gain necessary experience to do an effective job on the Council.

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3. Requires less campaigning time and money for election or reelection.
4. Permits an alderman to be more independent of pressures.

Against the four year term for aldermen:

1. It makes aldermen less accountable to the voters.

For non-staggered terms:

1. Electing all aldermen at once, instead of half at one time and half two years later, makes it easier to center voter interest on city-wide issues and results in less concentration on ward issues.
2. Makes buck-passing less likely: incumbents up for reelection can not hide behind those not up for reelection.
3. Decreases time spent on campaigning, since under staggered terms even those not up for reelection are involved in campaigning in the off years.
4. More likelihood of changing the complexion of the Council at one time, if the voters so decide.

Against non-staggered terms:

1. Less likelihood of continuity in the Council, since all the aldermen can be turned out at one time.
2. Permits voter expression half as often as under the staggered system.
3. May decrease voter turnout in interim elections of other officials (School, Park, Library boards and Board of Estimate and Taxation).
4. Increases likelihood of a sharp partisan battle in a nominally non-partisan election.

Why four year term for the Mayor, Comptroller and City Treasurer?

The Mayor would have more time to become familiar with the duties of his office and make a record, and would have to spend less time campaigning. The change would parallel that in the aldermen's terms.

As for the Comptroller and Treasurer, the League believes these positions eventually should be appointive rather than elective. However, this change probably should await more comprehensive reorganization of the City's fiscal administration. Meanwhile, the longer terms should make for improved administration of the Comptroller's and Treasurer's duties by virtue of the assurance of a longer term.

Why should the aldermen, Mayor, Comptroller and City Treasurer be elected at the same time, instead of at alternate elections?

One of the prime considerations in making the aldermen's terms non-staggered is to center attention on city-wide, rather than ward issues. This effect will be strengthened if the city-wide executive officers -- the Mayor, Comptroller and Treasurer -- are elected at the same time as the aldermen.

Why should the amendments go into effect in July 1957?

This will avoid confusion as to the term of office of candidates to be elected this year. It will also permit voters and potential candidates to give due consideration to the implications of the increased term in the election campaign in 1957.

II. Amendment to shift municipal election days from Monday to Tuesday

The proposal reads:

Chapter 2 of the Charter of the City of Minneapolis is hereby amended effective on and after January 1, 1957

by amending sections 5 and 7 to read as follows:

"Section 5. A general city election for the election of city officers shall be held biennially on the second Tuesday of June of each odd-numbered year."

"Section 7. Primary elections shall be held biennially on the second Tuesday of May of each odd-numbered year.";

and by amending the first sentence of Section 9 by striking therefrom the words "to be held on the second Monday in June of each odd-numbered year."

What would it do?

The city primary and general elections would be held on Tuesday instead of on Monday as at present.

Why the change?

Tuesday is the customary election day in all other elections.

Monday evening shopping has become increasingly common, which tends to interfere with voting.

People sometimes are out of town on Monday at the end of a long weekend. On the other hand, people sometimes leave town on Monday on business for several days, and are able to vote on Monday before leaving.

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III. Amendment to empower the City Council to set the salaries of the Aldermen and Mayor.

The proposal reads:

Chapter 3 of the City Charter of the City of Minneapolis is hereby amended effective July 1, 1955

by striking Section 23 thereof and renumbering sections 24 through 29 in numerical sequence starting with 23;

and by inserting the following after the second sentence in the new Section 24:

"Any changes in the salaries of the Mayor and aldermen shall take effect at the commencement of the succeeding term. Such changes must be adopted no later than the date of the primary election and no earlier than January 1 preceding said date. The salary of the Mayor shall be twice that of the aldermen."

What would it do?

At the present time the salaries of the aldermen and Mayor are set by the State Legislature and in effect by the Hennepin County delegation. This is because the salaries originally set in the Charter adopted in 1920 have proven inadequate, and the City Council and Mayor have resorted to the Legislature for increases. Sometimes the legislature sets the salaries, sometimes it gives the Council power to raise its salaries and sometimes it submits the question to the voters. The proposed amendment would give the Council the responsibility for setting the salaries of the aldermen and Mayor, and would limit this power in several ways: (1) salary actions would take effect in the succeeding terms of the aldermen and Mayor; (2) the actions would need to take place after January 1 preceding the start of the next term and before the primary election preceding the start of the next term; (3) the Mayor's salary would be twice that of the aldermen.

Why give the Council the salary power in this way?

The present procedure of resorting to the Legislature on salary matters nullifies home rule -- the right of local citizens to decide matters of local concern. It diffuses responsibility, and is a source of "trading" on other vital matters which must be handled in the Legislature.

Giving the salary-setting authority to the City Council would fix responsibility clearly in the City's policy-making body. If the aldermen act irresponsibly, they will open themselves to clear accountability at the next election. Most legislative bodies do have the power to set their salaries to take effect in successive terms. This is generally considered better procedure than having the voters vote on salary changes.

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Setting the time limit for aldermanic action on salary changes provides assurance that the salary action would neither be forgotten before the next election, nor would be taken with the help of the votes of one or more "lame duck" aldermen.

Setting the Mayor's salary at a definite relationship to that of the aldermen would permit the Mayor to retain his present independence of the Council. While there may be argument for a different type of relationship between these salaries, this appears to be a good rule-of-thumb ratio in view of past salaries and the present respective duties of the aldermen and the Mayor.

The Council is given power to set all other salaries under the charter

IV. Amendment to make the Mayor the presiding officer of the City Council with the right to vote in case of a tie

The proposal reads:

Chapters 3 and 4 of the City Charter of the City of Minneapolis are hereby amended effective on and after the first Monday in July of 1957

by adding to the second paragraph of Section 1 of Chapter 3 the following:

"He shall preside over the meetings of the City Council with the right to participate in debate and the power to vote, in case of a tie, but his power to vote in case of a tie shall in no way affect the quorum and majority provisions of this Charter.";

and by adding at the start of the second sentence of section 2 of Chapter 3 the following:

"In the absence of the Mayor.";

and by amending the third sentence of Section 1 of Chapter 4 to read as follows:

"The President or Vice President of the Council, shall in the absence of the Mayor, preside at all meetings."

What would it do?

The Mayor would be the Council's presiding officer. He would replace the Council President in this role. The latter is elected by and from the 13 aldermen. Under the amendment he would still preside in the absence of the Mayor.

The Mayor would have the power to cast a vote only in case of a tie.

Why this change in the Mayor-Council relationship?

While the Mayor nominally is the City's chief executive officer under the Charter, his powers are quite limited compared with the average chief executive of a large city. Moreover, the liaison between the Mayor and Council is not as strong as it might be, that is, the Mayor is not kept

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in close enough touch with actions of the Council, actions on which he has the veto power.

As presiding officer of the Council, the Mayor would have increased prestige and more certainty of first hand acquaintance with the business of the Council.

The power to vote in case of a tie would be of importance in the event of absences, aldermen passing on votes, or interim vacancies.

V. Amendment to change two ex officio members on the Library Board

The proposal reads:

Chapter 17 of the City Charter of the City of Minneapolis is hereby amended effective on and after the first Monday in July of 1955

by amending Section 2 to read as follows:

"Said Library Board shall consist of the Mayor of the City of Minneapolis, one member of the Board of Education to be appointed by the Board of Education, one member of the City Council to be appointed by the City Council, who shall respectively be ex officio members thereof, and six (6) other members who shall be elected from time to time as herein provided, by the legal voters of the City of Minneapolis, and who shall be resident and qualified electors of said city. At each general city election there shall be elected two Library Directors for the term of six (6) years, the term of said directors to begin on the first Monday of July of the year of their election. The members appointed by the Board of Education and City Council, respectively, shall be appointed for terms of two years each beginning the first Monday of July following a general city election."

What would it do?

It would change the composition of the Library Board so that (1) the Board of Education would designate one of its members to an ex officio membership on the Library Board, instead of requiring the School Board president to have the job, (2) the University President's ex officio membership would be abolished and instead the City Council would designate one of its members to serve on the Library Board ex officio. These assignments would be for two year periods.

Why is this change desirable?

The Library Board is composed of six members elected from the city at large for six year, staggered terms, and three ex officio members: the Mayor, the President of the Board of Education and the President of the University of Minnesota.

Poor attendance of Library Board members has created a continual problem in handling Board business regularly and effectively. Frequently

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regularly scheduled meetings are postponed because of a lack of a quorum. Many times a bare quorum of five is present. This problem has been of concern to Library officials and others interested in the system and close followers of the Library Board's work. Recently the Library Board President, Mr. Archie D. Walker, wrote the Citizens League about the attendance problem and suggested possible Charter changes.

The three ex officio members have had the poorest attendance records, although the current Mayor has attended quite regularly. This points to a frequently-cited problem of ex officio membership, namely, the fact that the member has other duties which are his primary responsibility and make it difficult for him to properly discharge his ex officio duties.

The Citizens League recognizes the shortcomings of ex officio memberships, but believes they have value under our present form of government in which powers are scattered among a number of separate boards and commissions. The ex officio memberships help tie the various agencies together and effect more coordinated action.

For this reason, the League feels the Mayor should retain his membership on the Library Board. The Mayor is the chief executive officer of the City, and provides some representation for the Library Board on the Board of Estimate and Taxation, where the Library Board has no representative .

There is a functional relationship between the library system and the school system. Besides the fact that both are in the general field of education, the Library Board does have branches in some of the school buildings. For this reason there is value in continuing to have School Board representatives on the Library Board. The proposed amendment would assure better attendance of the School Board member by permitting the School Board to name any one of its members to the Library Board. This would increase the number of possible persons available for the assignment, and thus should assure obtaining the person who can give adequate time to the assignment. The School Board president would of course still be eligible to hold the ex officio membership on the Library Board.

The University and the Library Board do not have the same functional relationship as the School Board and the Library Board. The amendment proposes, therefore, that the ex officio membership now held by the University president be given to the City Council. This would serve the purpose of better liaison between the Library Board and the City Council. It would probably be helpful for the Library Board to have this tie-in particularly on financial matters, since the Council has overall control on bond issues.