

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 75

**Citizens Interview Program  
Charter Reform for Minneapolis**

**April 1957**

Received by Bd of Directors 4/3/57

75

**CITIZENS INTERVIEW PROGRAM  
ON CHARTER REFORM**

4-3-57

No. 75

Citizens League  
601 Syndicate Building  
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

February 21, 1957

TO: Forms and Structure Committee

FROM: Mrs Stanley G. Peterson, Chairman,  
Citizens Interview Committee

SUBJECT: Final report on Citizen Interviews

The Forms and Structure Committee set out to get through personal interviews the carefully considered judgment of at least 100 key citizens relative to the committee's report on "An Analysis of Minneapolis City Government". The committee basically had three questions: (1) Did these citizens feel that the report makes a case for basic charter changes in Minneapolis city government? (2) If favoring change, which form of city government would they consider preferable? (3) What helps or suggestions could they offer for achieving such a change?

Fifty Citizens League men and women, organized into 25 teams, participated in the interviewing. They included members of this committee, directors, staff and other interested members.

Two questionnaires were drawn, the first of which was sent to citizens who were asked to read this report, and the second - an evaluation questionnaire - sent to interviewers. Each interviewer was requested to fill in and return an evaluation questionnaire on each interview made in order that one or two independent opinions might be obtained as to the degree of citizen interest in each instance.

In addition to the key citizens to whom this report and questionnaire were sent and an interview requested, the report and questionnaire were also sent to a considerable number of leading Citizens League members, including all members of the Board of Directors and this committee, as well as to a few prominent citizens who were known to be interested but who were unable, for a variety of reasons, to give a personal interview.

As a result of these efforts, a grand total of 135 questionnaires was filled in and returned to the Citizens League office by key citizens of Minneapolis and the adjacent area who had read this report. A vast majority of these citizens read the report with care and interest. A total of 87 were personally interviewed by Citizens League representatives.

A detailed summary of the interview project is attached (Appendix) but a few facts revealed by the results in response to key questions deserve special mention.

1. Of the 135 citizens who filled in the questionnaire, 125 said they felt that this report does indicate a need for charter change. However, a few (mostly department heads in the present city government, council and charter commission members) qualified their answers to this question by saying that, while charter change in certain restricted but important areas of city government is needed, they did not feel that change in the basic form of our city government would result in improved services or efficiency.

2. Eighty-seven citizens indicated a preference for change to a Mayor-Administrator-Council (MAC) form of government whereas twenty-nine preferred a change to the Council Manager (CM) form. Seven said they felt the present weak mayor-council form is satisfactory or had no preference. Business men showed a very strong preference for MAC while a preponderance of those known to have studied city government, either in a professional or lay capacity, over a period of years, seemed to feel that the CM form would be preferable.

3. On the question as to method of effecting charter change (i.e. by petition, charter commission or legislative action), a substantial majority (85) expressed a keen interest in the petition procedure, but many qualified their responses by saying that efforts should first be made to gain the confidence and support of the charter commission members.

4. Likewise, many said they felt that, with much hard work, over all charter reform could be achieved in Minneapolis provided that broad community support can be developed, including the cooperation of organized labor and business.

5. Of the 125 persons who returned questionnaires, at least 82 were willing to back up their opinions with action; i.e., they indicated their willingness to serve on a representative citizens committee for charter change should such a group be created.

Recommendation:

In summary, the committee believes that, while the citizens interviewed were a small and select sample, the results of the interviews do indicate justification for further exploration into the question of over-all charter change. We therefore recommend to the Board of Directors of the Citizens League that it take such steps as it may consider appropriate to initiate the creation of a broadly representative citizens committee which can implement the findings of this committee as set forth in the report on Minneapolis government and on the citizen interviews.

Approved by Forms and Structure Committee  
February 22, 1957

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF CITIZEN INTERVIEW PROGRAM

1. Questionnaires returned . . . . . 135
2. Interviews completed . . . . . 87
3. People who voted for need for change . . . . . 125
4. Those who preferred mayor-administrator-council form . . . . . 87
5. Those who preferred council-manager . . . . . 29
6. Those who preferred another form or no change . . . . . 7
7. Those who said they would be willing to serve on broad committee. 82

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Number and classification of people  
who answered questionnaire

Officeholders	17	Civic workers	18
Business	45	Unknown	6
Labor	4		
Professional	41		
Public Administra- tors	4	<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>

Responses to key questions in questionnaire

Do you favor: (a) part by part charter change by a series of amendments,  
or (b) thorough, coordinated structural reorganization in a single amendment?

Piecemeal	10
Wholesale	112

Do you believe that initiation of charter amendment by petition would have  
sufficient educational value to justify that procedure?

Yes	85
No	33

Which form of government do you favor for Minneapolis?

Mayor-administrator-council	87
Council-manager	29
Strong mayor	2
Present system	4
Other	1

Which form of government do you believe would find most favor with the voters?

Mayor-administrator-council	83
Council manager	24
Present system	8
Other	3

Do you believe the voters would approve of a major charter change to either the council-manager or Mayor-administrator and council forms:

a. From their present knowledge	0
b. After a brief but intensive campaign	20
c. Only after an extended campaign	98
d. Voters would not approve	6

II. Evaluation of attitudes toward charter change indicated by those interviewed.

How would you describe his or her general attitude:

Genuine receptiveness	67
Polite toleration	7
Disinterest	1

Would you describe his or her attitude toward the idea of need for charter change in Minneapolis as:

Very enthusiastic	50
Moderately enthusiastic	21
Disinterested	2
Negative	3

Did he seem to have rather definite, perhaps pre-judged ideas on the matter of form of city government:

Yes	51
No	19

Which of the following attitudes would you say would best describe this individual's action should a campaign for overall charter revision be initiated in the near future?

Very helpful	30
Moderately	25
Disinterested and inert	2
Skeptical	9

If he optimistic or pessimistic as to the success of such a program?

Optimistic	28
Pessimistic	22
In between	17

Summary of Comments and Suggestions of Questionnaire Respondents

The strategy of trying for charter change now:

Is not the need for action on metropolitan government changes more urgent, and would not League's energies be better devoted to this end than to charter change?

What a revised charter should contain

Include some "bait" for council support.

Write the best charter possible, don't compromise.

Cover the bare essentials.

Too much centralization is inimical to democracy.

Some at large election is needed.

At large election will needlessly alienate support.

The question of partial vs. wholesale change depends on how broad is the area of agreement.

The practicability of the petition method is a problem of strategy.

We should have party designation locally to weaken the effort of special interest groups.

Form is not as important as many think. Our structure has shown much flexibility. Parks, library, schools need separate boards. There are advantages in ponderous, cumbersome procedures.

Support.

Labor support needed.

Make early effort to get support of groups which opposed charter last time.

Get support of all special interest groups.

Get 150,000 petition signers.

Conducting the campaign

Need thousands of dollars, not thousands of people for the campaign.

comments - 2

Get testimony from ex officials. Involve persons who have not worked for charter reform before.

Get full time executive secretary, good speakers bureau.

Stress money-saving.

Make non-partisan pitch.

Get the support of the public officials.

Elected officials should take no part.

Use block organization.

Make charter an issue in the mayoral campaign.

Use area meetings.

Involve all Citizens League members, concentrate Citizens League activities on this project.