

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 150

**Statement on Minneapolis Charter
Revision Proposal**

February 1963

STATEMENT BY THE CITIZENS LEAGUE OF MINNEAPOLIS AND HENNEPIN COUNTY
OF A PRESENTATION TO THE MINNEAPOLIS CHARTER COMMISSION
AT ITS PUBLIC HEARING ON FEBRUARY 14, 1963

PREPARED BY: Citizens League Minneapolis Government Reorganization Committee,
Norman Stewart, Chairman

APPROVED BY: Citizens League Board of Directors at its meeting on February 13

SUBJECT: Response to the Charter Commission's request for reaction to its proposals
for charter change as contained in the Commission's tentative report dated
December 27

Before replying specifically to your proposals, may we comment briefly on the general Citizens League position on the subject of Minneapolis charter revision. The view held by most original League members that major charter change was urgently needed doubtless gave greater impetus to the founding of the League in 1952 than any single other governmental issue. Our organization began making specific proposals for charter change within a year after its establishment and we have continued to give this issue the highest priority over the years. We have on many occasions appeared before previous Charter Commissions, sometimes to make specific proposals of our own, and on other occasions to react to proposals made by others. When we last presented a statement to your Commission, on January 10, 1961, about the time you were beginning your review of the existing structure of Minneapolis city government, we expressed the following conclusions:

"In our opinion, the single greatest weakness in the Minneapolis governmental structure is its failure to provide sufficient city-wide leadership to meet effectively the increasingly complex problems facing our community. The powers given to the Mayor make him little more than the ceremonial head of the City, and with all members of the chief governing body, the City Council, elected by wards the citywide viewpoint is inadequately represented.

"The Citizens League has maintained consistently over the years that the major weakness in the form of Minneapolis city government can best be corrected by emphasizing the placement of executive and administrative functions under a Mayor elected citywide, and consolidating legislative functions under the City Council. This concept of separation of powers is the foundation on which our Federal Government, all 50 of our State Governments, and almost all other cities the size of Minneapolis is based.

"We take no final or adamant position as to whether the major changes needed in the structure of Minneapolis city government should be brought about by means of total revision in a single document or by piecemeal change. However, we do feel that any proposed change should be consistent with these basic concepts of government we have discussed and, further, we believe that any piecemeal amendment should be part of a long-range program rather than an end in itself.

"There appears to be general community agreement on the direction the structure of our Minneapolis city government should take. We are confident that, given the leadership of your Commission, agreement can be obtained on specific proposals to carry out these

objectives. To this end, we pledge our complete cooperation in working with your Commission and with other interested community groups."

Our expression of hope, made to you on January 10, 1961, that the Charter Commission would provide the leadership so necessary to obtaining agreement on specific proposals, has been fulfilled. The entire community is deeply indebted to you, the members of the Commission, for the vast amount of time you have so generously and unselfishly given during the past year and without which your carefully prepared tentative report of December 27, 1962 would not have been possible. We wish to take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of our organization for your splendid work during the past year.

We have reviewed your proposals on the basis of their adherence (1) to long-standing Citizens League recommendations, and (2) to the above-quoted conclusions as expressed to your Commission on January 10, 1961.

We are naturally pleased that your proposals emphasize placing executive and administrative functions under a Mayor elected citywide and consolidating legislative functions under the City Council. We are not surprised that you have concurred in this concept of separation of powers, since your conclusion is consistent with the recommendations made by previous Charter Commissions and with those made by almost every community organization which has studied Minneapolis city government over the past twenty or more years. Your specific proposals, in following this basic concept of governmental organization, will contribute immeasurably by helping provide the structure of government which can assure citywide leadership so essential to meeting effectively the increasingly complex problems facing our community.

It seems clear from your proposals that you have selected the "piecemeal" approach rather than the "overall" approach under which revision of the Minneapolis city charter would be accomplished in a single document. As we reported to you in our January 10, 1961 statement, we are not irrevocably committed to one approach over the other. Your proposals suggest the intention on your part of presenting to the voters a relatively comprehensive amendment and one which is consistent with the basic concepts of government we have discussed.

We gave vigorous support to the proposed CIVIC Charter amendment presented to the voters and defeated in 1960. We thought then, and we still do, that its adoption would have given to Minneapolis one of the finest structures of government of any city in the nation. However, we are not unaware of the political realities which dictate that neither the CIVIC Charter, nor anything as comprehensive, be re-submitted to the voters at this time. The two strongest criticisms of the CIVIC Charter were (1) that it proposed too substantial and too comprehensive a change from our present system, and (2) that it placed too much authority in the hands of a single elected official, the Mayor. We are, therefore, neither surprised nor necessarily displeased that many of your proposals seem designed to meet and overcome these two major objections.

We are particularly pleased that in your efforts to formulate proposals which are likely to attain a broader base of community support you have not sacrificed a number of the most urgently needed changes in our present system. We concur fully, for example, with your specific proposals to:

- (1) Shorten the unduly long ballot by eliminating the elective positions of Treasurer and Comptroller and elected members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the Library Board.

- (2) Consolidate in a single legislative body, the Council, authority to fix salaries for all employees of the City.
- (3) Provide for a single consolidated budget which would be prepared by the executive branch of city government, and presented by the Mayor to the legislative branch, the City Council, for its consideration and final decision.
- (4) Consolidate, to the extent possible, the numerous special mill levy funds.
- (5) Adhere to the important principle, at least for top level positions, of certification of more than one name for civil service positions.
- (6) Abolish the Board of Estimate and Taxation and assign its functions to the City Council.

We are limiting intentionally our suggestions for specific changes in the proposals contained in your tentative report to those few we regard as most important. We have adopted this course of action, not necessarily because we are convinced that your specific proposals are the best among alternatives which might be considered, but rather because in our opinion your proposal is an acceptable alternative. There are various ways of accomplishing the same objective and, where you have selected one of them, we have refrained from suggesting what we might consider preferable alternatives. We do, however, urge that you give consideration to the following suggested changes in the proposals contained in your tentative report:

- (1) Lengthening from the present two to four years the terms of office for the Mayor and members of the City Council.
- (2) Appointment rather than election of members of the Board of Park Commissioners.
- (3) Granting to the Mayor the authority to veto individual items in appropriation ordinances.
- (4) Placing a maximum time limit of perhaps 60 days on the exercise of the City Council's power to confirm the Mayor's administrative appointees.
- (5) Requiring an extraordinary majority for passage by the City Council of appropriations supplemental to those contained in the annual appropriation ordinance.
- (6) Granting to the City Council the authority to fix and, from time to time, change the salary of the Mayor and members of the City Council, but providing that no increase in salary for members of the Council would become effective in the term in which voted and no decrease in the salary of the Mayor would become effective in the term in which voted.

You doubtless will receive numerous suggestions to change the proposals contained in your tentative report. While we naturally hope our own suggestions will be among those favorably considered when the charter amendment is placed in final form, we in no way wish to create the impression that the support of our

organization is conditioned on your acceptance of any or all of these proposed changes. We know full well that the urgently needed revision of the structure of Minneapolis city government will not come about unless there is a willingness on the part of leading community citizen organizations to compromise where fundamental concepts are not involved. The one alternative to a willingness to compromise is to continue to operate under our existing totally inadequate structure of government. This is an alternative no responsible citizen or organization should want.

If the proposals contained in your tentative report are not materially modified, either in terms of their comprehensiveness or in deviating from the basic concepts, we pledge our wholehearted and active support. We are confident that if other community organizations and public officials who sincerely want to improve the structure of Minneapolis city government will react to your proposals in a similar spirit of compromise, then the much needed and long overdue revision of our charter will become a reality.