

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 51

**City of Minneapolis
Suggested Principles of Charter
Improvement**

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Citizens League
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STATEMENT OF SUGGESTED PRINCIPLES OF CHARTER IMPROVEMENT

Adopted by the Forms and Structure of Government Committee
and approved by the Board of Directors, January 11, 1956

PREFACE

Government in our democratic society is a means, not an end in itself.

The nature of the means has an important influence on the attainment of the end. Government serves best as:

1. It is responsive to the desires of the people
2. It performs the services desired by the people in an economical and efficient manner.

Government is made of men and laws. The men in government have a good deal of influence on the type of laws within which the government functions and the manner in which the laws are carried out. However, they do not have the final say upon the basic laws. In local government the basic laws are determined by the State Constitution and State Statutes and, where "home rule" exists, by the local voters through their power to adopt and revise their "home rule" charter.

The basic laws, or charter, set the ground rules as to personnel, powers, organization and procedures. They have a direct effect upon the calibre of men who run for office, who are chosen to run the government, and the type and quality of job which the men are able to do.

Following are suggested objectives of charter improvement. Proposed charter changes would be regarded as desirable or undesirable, from the viewpoint of charter improvement, when tested by these objectives.

The committee believes that many of the objectives are interrelated, so that any particular objective standing alone might not necessarily be supported by the committee.

I. TO PROVIDE GREATER CITIZEN INTEREST, PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL.

1. IMPROVE VISIBILITY. Government can be held responsible more easily when powers are located where all can see them, when the relationships between governmental officials and groups are clear and governmental machinery is simple.
2. ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY CHARTER DETAILS. As the basic law of a city, the charter should be broad and flexible enough to permit changes in policy and administration without being constantly amended.

3. PROVIDE FOR THE ELECTION OF ONLY THOSE OFFICERS NECESSARY FOR ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION AND SOUND POLICY DETERMINATION AND LEADERSHIP. The greater the number of officers to be voted on, the greater the difficulty of the voter's making an intelligent choice, and the greater the likelihood of his being discouraged from voting or trying to make an intelligent choice.
 4. ELIMINATE CONFLICTING OR OVERLAPPING JURISDICTIONS. When two governmental agencies provide the same or similar service in a single geographical area, it is likely that money is being wasted. It also adds to the voter's confusion, deadening citizen interest and reducing governmental responsibility.
 5. PLACE TOP EXECUTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IN AN ELECTED OFFICIAL OR ONE CHOSEN BY AND RESPONSIBLE TO THE LEGISLATIVE BODY. Administrators, whose qualifications for their jobs are technical and cannot be easily known by the voter in an election campaign, should not be elected, but should be appointed by elected officials to whom they are directly responsible.
 6. REQUIRE AN ANNUAL INDEPENDENT POST-AUDIT. This provides the public and the legislative body with more assurance that the finances of the government are handled efficiently and in accordance with law and the stated policies of the legislative body.
- II. TO PROVIDE A LEGISLATIVE BODY WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC AND IS ABLE TO SEE THAT THE POLICY IT FORMS IS PROPERLY EXECUTED.
1. CENTRALIZE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEGISLATION. If legislative powers are centralized instead of scattered, policy-making is more likely to take into account all governmental needs and resources. Control of the school system, however, should be exercised by a separate body because of the large size of its operation and the traditional separation of education from other city functions.
 2. CENTRALIZE TAX-LEVYING POWERS. The power of the purse is a necessary adjunct to the power of legislation. Centralization of legislative powers requires centralization of tax-levying powers.
 3. AVOID LEGISLATIVE INTERFERENCE WITH DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION.
 4. AVOID EAR-MARKING OF FUNDS. Ear-marking of funds in the charter ties the hands of elected representatives who should be responsible for allocating funds on the basis of relative need. It tends to make the elective officials less responsible.
 5. PROVIDE AN EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCH SO ORGANIZED AS TO MAKE THE DUTIES AND PERFORMANCE OF EACH DEPARTMENT EASY TO VIEW AND APPRAISE. Only if this is done can the legislative body know how its laws are being administered.
- III. TO PROVIDE AN ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION WHICH CARRIES OUT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS WITH EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY.
1. CENTRALIZE AND CLEARLY ESTABLISH ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY. The purpose is to bring about coordinated and

effective planning and execution of administrative programs and less duplication.

2. SIMPLIFY GOVERNMENTAL MACHINERY. Group like services together, avoid duplication, establish clear lines of authority and responsibility, improve internal control and general coordination.
3. IMPROVE PROCEDURES FOR FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL. Provide the maximum information about services, performance and finances to enable, the legislative body to plan wisely in spending the tax dollar. Provide constant reporting and controls on the spending of money to be sure it is spent as planned and can be adjusted to changing conditions.
4. GIVE THE TOP ADMINISTRATIVE HEAD EFFECTIVE TOOLS OF MANAGEMENT by placing under him the staff functions of personnel administration, financial management, legal advice and systems and procedures analysis.
5. PROVIDE DEPARTMENT HEADS WITH ADEQUATE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE for controlling their departments.
6. CENTRALIZE WHEREVER PRACTICABLE THE "HOUSEKEEPING" FUNCTIONS such as building operation and maintenance, messenger service, stenographic and duplicating services, machine accounting, equipment service, and records management.