

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 166

**City of Minneapolis  
Restructuring of City Government**

**January 1964**

Citizens League  
545 Mobil Oil Building  
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
JAN 29 1964

STATEMENT FOR PRESENTATION TO THE MINNEAPOLIS CHARTER COMMISSION AT ITS PUBLIC HEARING ON JANUARY 30, 1964

TO: Members, Minneapolis Charter Commission

FROM: Citizens League of Minneapolis and Hennepin County

SUBJECT: Response to the Charter Commission's request for the current views of our organization on the subject of structural revision of Minneapolis city government.

Thank you for inviting us to share with you our current thoughts on the subject of revising the structure of Minneapolis city government. Our comments today will be quite general in nature, since we believe that specific suggestions or recommendations from our organization will be more appropriate at a later date.

Over the years the Citizens League has assigned the highest priority to the area of local government involving the structure of Minneapolis city government. Our organization began making specific proposals for charter change as early as 1953, and since that time hardly a year has passed without the undertaking of extensive research on one or more aspects of the subject. Our viewpoints are so well known that we shall not impose on your time today by reviewing our previous criticisms of the present structure, nor by restating our past specific recommendations for changes in this structure.

However, a brief restatement of our basic position might be of value.

The Citizens League has, over the years, consistently maintained that the major weaknesses in the form of Minneapolis city government can best be corrected by structural change emphasizing the placement of executive and administrative functions under a mayor elected citywide, and consolidating legislative functions under the City Council. This system, far from being novel or untried, has proven itself through the test of extensive experience elsewhere. Locally, every objective and penetrating review of the functioning of Minneapolis city government during the past twenty or more years has recommended this form of government for Minneapolis. Both charter commissions, including your own, which have undertaken intensive reviews of the structure of Minneapolis government have incorporated this concept of government in their specific proposals.

Nothing which has happened has given us cause to abandon or modify our basic convictions about the form of government which would produce the best results for the people of Minneapolis.

However, despite these seemingly persuasive arguments in favor of the type of charter change we have urged and supported, we are now confronted by the fact that the voters of Minneapolis have rejected by substantial majorities proposed charter amendments designed to accomplish this objective.

Numerous and varying conclusions can be drawn to explain the defeat of these charter amendments. Although no useful purpose would be served by an exhaustive analysis of these conclusions, there appears to be at least one inescapable conclusion which should be given careful consideration as your commission attempts to

chart a future course of action. Experience in other cities has shown that major reform of the structure of government is almost never attained in the absence of deep-seated voter dissatisfaction, a mood usually brought on by events, such as a scandal in government or the growing physical deterioration of the city. Unless this type of voter dissatisfaction is present, undue credence is inevitably given to suggested fears of what might happen under the proposed change, and the voters invariably prefer to stay with what they have and know.

This type of voter dissatisfaction did not exist in Minneapolis at the time any of the major charter amendments was submitted and, in our judgment, no such mood exists today. Unless or until substantial voter dissatisfaction evidences itself, the only way we know to attain major charter change in Minneapolis is to secure such widespread community agreement on a proposed amendment, including the support of most elected city officials, as to make the proposed amendment all but non-controversial.

Based on past experience and present attitudes, the necessary degree of agreement would not appear attainable for any amendment transferring substantial executive and administrative authority to the office of the mayor. No concerted effort has been made, at least in recent years, to determine whether widespread community agreement might be achieved for charter change proposing the establishment of the council-manager form of government in Minneapolis. Although past positions and statements, particularly by leaders of organized labor, make it somewhat dubious that widespread agreement could be attained, your commission might find it worthwhile to invite specific reaction from interested community organizations and public officials.

As for the position of the Citizens League, it is true that we have not preferred the council-manager form of government for Minneapolis. However, we have at no time expressed adamant opposition. On the contrary, as we stated to your commission in March, 1961, we regard the council-manager form as a distinct improvement over that which we now have. We also commented at that time that no major city which has this form of government elects all members of its chief governing body by wards, and we suggested that any significant step in the direction of this form of government in Minneapolis should envision substantial at-large representation on the City Council. The viewpoints expressed to you at that time are reflective of our present thinking.

With the possible exception of an amendment establishing a Department of Finance under the mayor, it is probable that successful endeavors to improve the structure of Minneapolis city government, at least for the immediate future, must of practical necessity be limited to refinements within the existing system. Amendments of this type, although falling far short of the city's needs, could bring improvements in the functioning of Minneapolis city government. We regard modest changes as clearly superior to no progress at all.

In conclusion, we urge your commission to develop proposals for needed charter changes and to exert your influence to develop widespread community support for such amendments before they are submitted to the voters. We pledge to you and to every other community group and public body interested in improving the functioning of Minneapolis city government that we shall give prompt, careful and objective consideration to each and every amendment which might be proposed. Until or unless we see evidence of a change in voter sentiment, we shall review the proposal within the context of the limited objective which we believe is presently attainable. If, in our judgment, the functioning of city government would be advanced by the proposed amendment, then we shall urge its support by the voters.