

STATEMENT BY THE CITIZENS LEAGUE
TO THE TASK FORCE OF
THE MINNEAPOLIS CHARTER COMMISSION
July 31, 1973

1. We commend the Charter Commission for establishing this task force and for deciding to spend time this summer reviewing the adequacy of the organization and procedures in city government.

The people who work in government, elected and appointed, do, of course, make much, if not most, of the difference. But the structures . . . the 'rules of the game' . . . make a difference as well. A faulty or obsolete organization can make even a good group of individuals quarrelsome and unproductive. A sound organizational pattern, on the other hand, that changes and adapts as the times change, will provide a framework within which the employees of the city and policy officials can work together with maximum accomplishment.

It is the Charter Commission that is responsible for keeping the organization of the city in sound working order. If there are problems, it is the Commission's job to diagnose it. If there's a need for change, it is the Commission's job to propose that change.

Currently, there do, in fact, seem to be symptoms of trouble with the basic organizational arrangements. We are glad, therefore . . . and we think it is appropriate . . . that this task force has been established.

2. We believe that some significant change in the organization of city government is possible between now and the general election next November . . . if we break off a manageable piece of the total problem and if we can develop a proposal which is basically simple (though highly strategic).

We say this for several reasons. First, the problems with the present organizational structure are becoming increasingly clear. Second, the efforts by citizen groups (twice over the past three years) to initiate changes in the charter have created a sense that something may, in fact, need to be adjusted. Third, the growing involvement of the State Legislature in the organizational (as well as fiscal) pattern of local government is forcing -- for municipalities -- the question of whether they would prefer to move on this problem on their own, rather than have it handled for them.

3. The Citizens League, in 1968-1970, undertook an in-depth re-study of the problem of government organization in the City of Minneapolis. Our conclusion was that the first question that must be addressed is not the question of reorganizing the administration of city programs and services, but, rather, the central question of political leadership.

Copies of these reports have been provided to members of the Commission. We tried in this study to begin with the real problems that actually exist in the city of Minneapolis . . . then to ask how far those problems were created by the way in which the city government is organized . . . then to ask what changes

might be reasonably made in the city government organization that would cure those problems -- without creating, in the process, other new problems.

In our examination of the executive side of city government, the problem of leadership came to the top much more forcefully than problems of administration.

4. We feel that events since release of that report have basically reinforced the conclusion of that committee. Briefly, the problem presents itself this way:

- * Clearly, the principal job of the city government (aside from on-going house-keeping, now that most of the major countywide and areawide facilities have been turned over to other agencies) is the rebuilding of the sections of Minneapolis -- the commercial, the residential, the industrial, and the public facilities . . . with major attention to the human, social and fiscal aspects of this change. This is an enormously complex and difficult job -- technically and politically. It requires the clearest and the strongest leadership for the people of the city about the things that need to be done in any year or in any five-year period, as Minneapolis goes through this transition.
- * The office of Mayor -- though filled in a citywide election, and therefore most visible to the public -- continues nevertheless to have little ability or obligation to take the lead on major program and policy problems. Rather, . . . because the proposals are appearing from the Council and its staff (as indicated below), and because the decisions are being made by the Council . . . strong pressures are appearing for the Mayor institutionally to become the 'checking' and 'balancing' force, countervailing against the City Council.
- * The City Council has -- as the administrator of the city closest to the problems -- been taking the lead. It has been making the basic proposals for much of this re-building program.

This creates one major problem . . . because the City Council thus becomes both the "proposer" and the "disposer." This creates the impression, outside City Hall, of decisions without open public debate. It is the source of the feeling in the citizenry that, by the time things are proposed, they are decided. And it is the source of the popular concern about "checks and balances" or about "representative government" in city government.

- * To the extent that the City Council, on the other hand, waits for a "lead" or proposal from the staff, another kind of problem is created which is equally serious. The staff then is forced into the role, in effect, of the policy leader for the city.

This has, in fact, been developing . . . and the consequences are already beginning to be seen. The staff is becoming increasingly the center of political controversy. The implication is that the staff, being in the policy business, will come and go as policy control changes in city government. This would be a very fundamental change from the long tradition in Minneapolis city government of career service by top city employees, regardless of majority control of the City Council. We believe its implications deserve the most serious consideration by the Commission, as well as by other groups concerned about the stability and continuity of the city government.

- * This is leading the city toward an arrangement in which the leadership role is played by a committee, with its proposals reviewed and ratified by a single individual. In virtually every other governmental system the arrangement is precisely the reverse: The proposals come from a single individual, elected at large, with the review and ratification role then played by the committee (the City Council) representing the various geographic parts of the city.
 - * Minneapolis is not necessarily wrong simply because it is different. Our Citizens League study in 1969 concluded, however, that the arrangement into which we are drifting is wrong . . . because of the consequences that, demonstrably, it has, here. We concluded that the No. 1 priority in the area of structural change is to straighten out the present relationships among Mayor, City Coordinator and City Council President . . . who, presently, divide the essential attributes of political leadership, each one possessing at least one key attribute but lacking others.
5. We therefore urge that the task force carefully examine the recommendations of our 1969 report, which were aimed at the single centrally important goal of providing a focus for political leadership. That report recommended:
- * That there be a merger of the offices of Mayor and City Council President.
 - * That the Mayor be enabled and required, with the assistance of the Coordinator and his staff, to present to the Council proposals on the major issues and decisions confronting the city.
- An annual message on the physical, social and economic development of the city.
 - A proposal for legislation to be sought from the Minnesota Legislature.
 - An annual budget, both operating and capital, with recommendations as to the source and rate of financing required.
- In this budget process the departmental requests would be gathered together by the Coordinator for the Mayor, who would analyze and review them, making increases and reductions in the proposals as he feels appropriate, and then would present this budget, together with his own comments, to the City Council for the Council's review for adjustment and final adoption.
- * That the Mayor continue to exercise the veto, and have no vote in City Council decisions. The veto should extend to committee reports as well as to ordinances and resolutions, so that the Mayor becomes involved in the administrative work of the City and in the appointment of city staff.
6. We believe this change, while not without its complications, will offer several clear advantages:
- * It will reduce the internal strife and disagreement within City Hall which results from the isolation of the Mayor within the system; and will increase the probability of the Mayor and Council working together, though in their different roles, on the problems of the city.

- * It will, at the same time, preserve the necessary check and balance. The Mayor will not be a voting member of the Council, nor will he be drawn into the endless details as the line services of the city are reviewed by the administrative committees of the City Council. He will be drawn (through the veto) only into issues where some major issue is at stake, rather than (if he voted) into every issue. His presence in the the Council and his substantially enlarged contact with the central staff of the city will assure that his proposals -- and his vetoes, where necessary -- are based on much fuller information than exists for the Mayor's office at present. In this sense, the check and balance -- by being more informed -- becomes more effective than it is at present, with the Mayor detached from both the proposal-making and the proposal reviewing process.
 - * It will reduce significantly the policy/political role into which the Coordinator and his staff are being drawn by the absence of any other clear focus for program and policy leadership in the city structure. It will, therefore, protect these individuals and these officers in their proper role as professional administrators and advisors to the elected policy officials -- Mayor and Council majority and minority.
 - * It will enable the Aldermen to become increasingly responsive as representatives of the citizens in the various parts of the city . . . reviewing, critiquing and amending the proposals made by the Mayor with the assistance of the staff.
7. We believe this change is possible this year. Its chances probably depend significantly on the response to this proposal from the individuals who will become candidates for Mayor in the election this coming fall. We therefore urge the Commission, once its proposal is put in draft form, to invite a review of it by the candidates for Mayor and to solicit their comments about it.

The schedule might then run as follows:

- * Early August: Task force report to the full Commission with a draft of the proposed change.
 - * Mid-August to late August: Hearings and comments by the candidates for Mayor, citizens, and other interested parties.
 - * September: Action by the full Commission to place a proposal on the ballot.
 - * October: Full discussion with the citizenry in the course of the campaign.
 - * November: Decision by the voters.
 - * January: Implementation.
8. These changes are not non-controversial. But not to act will also have its consequences . . . which may be adverse. This is the dilemma this Commission and this task force must weigh.

The City can stand pat only if all other parties stand pat. And the fact is that the outside situation is changing.

For example: The office of the Coordinator has grown over the last eight years into an entirely new role not recognized in the charter at all. The office of Mayor has been changing its role. The citizens have been moving toward an interest in charter change on their own . . . through a process that offers minimum opportunity for careful reflection and draftsmanship. Finally, and perhaps most important, other governmental organizations, better equipped structurally to respond to problems, have been enlarging their roles, often at the expense of Minneapolis government.

Again: It is the Charter Commission that is in charge of maintaining the basic organizational arrangements for this city and its government. We do hope and urge that you will give your most serious consideration to these issues, and to the possibility of putting together a proposal that could be discussed and acted on by the people of this city this year.