

July 7, 1976

Mr. Stephen Aldrich
Chairman, Minneapolis Charter Commission
City Hall
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Dear Mr. Aldrich:

Your Commission's efforts to deal with the basic organizational deficiencies in Minneapolis city government could not have come at a better time. The events of the last several weeks in City Hall have made it clear, if it was not before, that the problems there are not primarily the problems of people. They are in substantial measure the problems of the system in which people work.

We believe, in fact, that the developments of recent weeks have built a strong case for an even more comprehensive change--especially, in the fundamental arrangement for making decisions on major issues--than your Commission could feel justified in proposing at the time you approved the draft amendments now before us for public hearing.

- * One such development, certainly, is the resignation of the City Coordinator. It seems impossible to believe that the city will proceed, now, simply to search for and to hire a replacement. Some change, in the procedures--and, beyond that, the organization--of that office, is clearly going to be a precondition of finding a new person to fill the job.
- * A second is the call by Mayor Stenvig for substantial charter change. His recommendations to you affirm in yet another way the importance of having the major proposals that are now coming from the Coordinator moving to the City Council, in the future, from the Mayor.

We join Mayor Stenvig in urging your Commission to open up discussion more broadly--in your own deliberations, and in the community debate that is possible in the course of your hearings--to a more substantial change that goes beyond the 'planning and budgeting' amendments you have presently proposed.

We believe the time is right, and that voter acceptance is possible, for a change that truly addresses the basic problems of securing strong and effective--and politically accountable--leadership on the critical problems that face the City of Minneapolis.

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We propose a simple but strategic three-part change:

1. The Mayor would be enabled and required to play the key role in policy leadership through the presentation of the budget, the development plan and the legislative program.
2. The Coordinator, now responsible for the preparation and presentation of the plan and budget to the City Council, would be appointed by the Mayor, and would provide staff assistance to the Mayor in his new policy leadership role.
3. A single office of political leadership would be created, by providing for the Mayor to become the presiding officer of the City Council. He would not be a voting member of the Council. He would retain the veto authority that presently exists.

These three interrelated changes hold out, we believe, the best promise of any proposal in recent years for resolving the long and perplexing dilemma of charter reform in Minneapolis: How to strengthen the leadership role of the Mayor, as the key official elected citywide; consistent with the desire of Minneapolis voters to retain the administrative operations of the city government under the supervision and control of the City Council.

There is general agreement on the problem that must be addressed.

In Minneapolis' almost unique city government, virtually all the powers-- administrative as well as legislative--are in, and exercised by, the City Council. Department heads are appointed by the Council, and report to the Council through its standing committees. The Coordinator functions both to assist the Council in analyzing the proposals coming from the operating departments, and to present to the Council proposals of his own on major city issues.

The weakness in the system (as a series of Citizens League reports has concluded over many years) is in policy leadership. Authority, information and responsibility are divided, so leadership is not effective. And, what leadership does emerge is not accountable to the people of the city.

- * The Mayor is 'responsible'. He is the one expected to lead. It is in his campaign that major issues about city finance and development arise.

But the Mayor has little authority, other than his citywide credibility, with which to follow through. He does not sit in the whole flow of decision-making that comes through the City Council. He is not on the third floor, where the action is. He is cut off, therefore, from the flow of information essential to effectiveness.

- * The Coordinator directs the central management staff. His strength, therefore, is that he is in possession of the information. He presents the major proposals to the City Council.

But he does not face the electorate--to inform and persuade the voters, and to learn from them. In the long run, this fundamentally undercuts his effectiveness.

- * The City Council President is the most powerful single policy official. He presides over the City Council, literally and figuratively, in its daily business of legislation and administration. The Coordinator works for him, more than for any other single person.

But he too is not responsible to the electorate of the city. He is elected from a ward. Major issues of city development and finance normally do not arise in his campaign. He runs on ward issues.

There are three possible ways in which the major elements of political leadership might now be arranged, in Minneapolis government.

- * One is to continue the present system, essentially unchanged. Legislative and administrative authority would remain in the City Council. The Mayor would remain essentially outside the system, with respect to his formal powers. A new Coordinator would be hired, perhaps with some small changes internally in the organization and procedures of that office. The Mayor would perhaps be moved physically to the third floor, as now proposed.
- * The second is to give the Mayor the responsibility and authority to become the policy leader . . . and to equip him to perform this role by transferring to a new executive branch the responsibility for the administrative operations of the city government. The Mayor would appoint the department heads, and would supervise their activities. The City Council would become a legislative body, on essentially the model that exists in government at the state and national levels. This is the arrangement proposed in 1948 when Hubert Humphrey was Mayor. It is the proposal enthusiastically supported by the Citizens League in 1960 and 1963. It is essentially the arrangement proposed to you by Mayor Stenvig July 1.
- * The third is to give the Mayor the responsibility and authority to become the policy leader, while retaining the present system of City Council responsibility for legislation and administration . . . and to equip him to perform this role by placing under his direction the staff of the City Coordinator presently performing the functions of planning and budgeting. In addition, the Mayor should come in to the City Council.

We have indicated already our rejection of the first alternative, of remaining with the status quo.

The second presents a more difficult issue. This 'separation of powers' system would provide for Minneapolis the arrangement common at higher levels of government, and in many other large municipalities; and well understood, generally. The major problem is the record of rejection of this arrangement by the voters of Minneapolis on all three occasions at which it has been presented. Partly because of this . . . and partly because the problems of the city do not now seem to be heavily those of more efficient daily administration . . . the Citizens League recently has looked increasingly toward a change focused more narrowly on the question of political leadership--leaving open the larger and longer range question about the ultimate form city government may assume.

The third alternative, therefore, embodied in our report in 1969, is the one we now urge your Commission to present to the voters.

It is to be sure, uniquely designed for the very different governmental system that exists in Minneapolis--as any change will be, so long as administrative responsibility remains under the City Council. It is, however, addressed to what we believe is the primary issue now facing the city. It will be constructive change. And it will not foreclose other changes, even in other directions, in the future.

Whatever changes are offered to the voters should be presented as a package, to ensure maximum consistency in the reorganization that is undertaken. The commission's planning and budgeting amendments--now presented separately--should be consolidated together, if they are put on the ballot. Similarly, the three changes we now propose should be consolidated, since we regard them as three elements of essentially a single, coherent reorganization.

Let me conclude by urging again that your Commission 'aim a little higher' in its decision about the proposed amendment to submit to the voters this fall.

Once again: We concur fully in your judgment that the city needs a strengthened and more accountable leadership on major issues of finance, development and intergovernmental relations . . . and that this is properly and necessarily a role to be played by the Mayor. But the city needs an even more fundamental solution to its organizational problems. And support for such a broader change is, we believe, increasing.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our views. We would be pleased to talk with you further, either about the need for the changes we propose, or about the mechanics of their operations.

Sincerely,

Greer Lockhart
Chairman
Governmental Structure Task Force

GL:HL

The Charter of the City of Minneapolis is hereby amended as follows:

Section 1. Chapter 3, Section 1, is amended to read:

Section 1. Powers and Duties of Mayor. The Mayor shall take care that the laws of the State and the ordinances of the city are duly observed and enforced within the city. He shall take care that all other officers of the city discharge their respective duties, and to that end may maintain an action of mandamus or other appropriate action against any delinquent city officer.

He shall from time to time give the City Council such information and recommend such measures as he may deem advantageous to the city, and for the accomplishment of this purpose shall appoint, by and with the consent of the City Council, some suitable person as head of the Office of the City Coordinator, the functions of which shall be as presently defined by ordinance and by statute.

All ordinances and resolutions shall, before they take effect, be presented to the Mayor, and if he approve thereof, he shall sign the same, and such as he shall not sign he shall return to the City Council, with his objections thereto, by depositing the same with the City Clerk, to be presented to the City Council at their next meeting thereafter. Upon the return of any ordinance or resolution by the Mayor, the vote by which the same was passed shall be deemed to have been reconsidered, and the question shall be again put upon the passage of the same, notwithstanding the objections of the Mayor, and if upon such vote the City Council shall pass the same by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the Council, it shall have the same effect as if approved by the Mayor. If any ordinance or resolution shall not be returned by the Mayor within five days, Sundays excepted, after it shall be presented to him, the same shall have the same force and effect as if approved by the Mayor.

The Mayor shall sign all contracts made for the City of Minneapolis, by the authority of the City Council.

Section 2. Chapter 3, Section 2, is amended to read:

Section 2. City Council--President and Vice President--Their Duties.

The Mayor shall in addition to his other powers and responsibilities serve as presiding officer of the City Council, and while exercising this responsibility shall be known as its President. He shall not be a voting member of the City Council. At the first meeting of the City Council in January of each year following a general municipal election they shall proceed to elect by ballot from their members a Vice-President. During the absence of the President from the city or his inability for any reason to discharge the duties of his office the Vice-President shall exercise all the power and discharge all the duties of the President and Mayor. In case the President shall be absent from any meeting of the City Council, the Vice-President shall discharge the duties of such President and act in his place. The temporary presiding officer while performing the duties of Mayor shall be styled acting Mayor, and acts performed by him when acting as Mayor as aforesaid shall have the same force and validity as if performed by the Mayor.