

CITIZENS LEAGUE
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, MN 55402

July 6, 1981

STATEMENT TO THE MINNEAPOLIS CHARTER COMMISSION

We urge that you adopt the proposed charter amendment approved by your subcommittee that would make the Mayor the presiding officer of the Council, retaining the veto but without giving the Mayor a vote on the Council.

The time is right, now, for the Charter Commission to move ahead with Mayor/Council unification, by charter, as a complement to the efforts of the incumbent City Council President and Mayor to unify staff, by ordinance.

We reject arguments that proposed ordinance changes should be given time to be tried before a charter amendment is submitted. The Council and Mayor may be able to accomplish changes in staff responsibilities by ordinance, but they cannot and should not try to handle essential structural change by ordinance. That job requires a charter amendment and should be handled by the voters through the Charter Commission.

It is not enough to give the Mayor "speaking privileges" on the Council, as is envisioned by the proposal of the incumbent Council President and Mayor, without changing the charter. Such a proposal indicates that the problems of Minneapolis city government would be solved if the City Council would let the Mayor attend meetings and be allowed to talk now and then. If, in fact, that were the problem, it would be satisfied only to the degree that the persons involved were to continue to support such an arrangement. "Speaking privileges" would not even be guaranteed by ordinance. But such an approach is fundamentally defective. The Mayor, as a city-wide elected leader, should be the presiding officer of the Council. It would be demeaning to the office--and would probably diminish prospects of the Mayor ever being named the presiding officer--if, now, the Mayor were just given "speaking privileges."

Some persons may say that this is the wrong year to propose charter change and that there is little support. We believe it is the right year, and that there is strong support. The agreement of the Council President and Mayor on staff unification underscores the fact that something needs to change.

If it is the wrong year, the people will tell us, by defeating the measure, which would present a clear message to groups such as ours which have been advocating change.

We hope the Charter Commission will recognize its responsibilities lie in giving the voters a chance to decide. We think they will vote yes.