

# CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 81

## **Proposed Charter Changes for Minneapolis City Government**

**October 1957**

Citizens League  
601 Syndicate Building  
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

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A consensus of proposed

Minneapolis Charter Changes

Introductory: The Forms and Structure of Government Committee of the Citizens League submits the following proposals as a basis for study and discussion. This is not a blueprint, but a sense of direction.

We believe that good government requires a clear allocation of responsibility and authority for legislation and for administration under city officials directly accountable to the voters. These proposals are aimed at that objective but are not meant to be final answers. Final and detailed proposals for submission to a vote of the people will have to be worked out by experts in charter draftsmanship under the guidance of the Minneapolis Charter Commission after thorough public discussion.

Tentative Proposals:

Council:

1. Make the council the legislative head of the city, responsible for legislation, appropriations, tax levies, bond issues, and for checking on the administration.

a. Change terms of office from two to four years.

b. City Council election: as at present, 13 aldermen elected by wards.  
(see commentary attached)

c. Give council the powers and duties of Board of Estimate and Taxation, except budget preparation which would be handled by the Department of Administration.

d. Give the Council the power to consolidate tax levies for all city departments, including health and welfare. School, library, and park boards would set their own levies subject to charter limitations.

e. Give council power to set the mayor's pay, and its own pay to take effect during the following terms; power to contract for or to employ research and auditing services; and continue present power to appoint the city clerk.

f. Authorize the departments and boards to contract with one another for provision of common services.

Mayor:

2. Make the mayor the executive head of the city, aided by a chief administrative officer and department of administration.

a. Change term of office from two to four years.

b. Give the mayor power to appoint with the advice and consent of the council, 7 department heads, to serve at the pleasure of the mayor: chief administrative officer, director of public safety, director of public works, director of health and welfare, director of finance, director of planning and the city attorney; and to serve for a fixed term: the city assessor. All other officials would serve, as specified in the charter, either for fixed terms or under civil service. (see attached chart and comments)

c. Administration of city affairs would be conducted through eight departments.

-Department of Administration under chief administrative officer, with general powers to coordinate all administration for which the mayor is responsible. A budget director and personnel director would serve on the staff of this department.

-Department of Public Safety under a director of public safety. In this department reporting to the director of public safety would be the police chief, fire chief, director of civil defense, officials in charge of licensing and inspection.

-Department of Public works under director of public works (city engineer).

-Department of Health and Welfare under director of health and welfare, with health and hospitals board serving in an advisory capacity.

-Finance Department under a director of finance. In this department would serve the city treasurer, comptroller and purchasing agent.

-Department of Planning under a director of planning, with a planning board serving in an advisory capacity.

-City Attorney

-City Assessor

d. Civil Service Commission as at present.

Supplementary Comments on  
Proposals for Minneapolis Charter Change  
(See statement of proposals and chart)

The separation of legislative and administrative functions proposed would follow more closely the patterns of state and federal government, and of other cities, than does the present city charter. The terms of both the mayor and city council would be extended to four years. The city council, rather than the State Legislature, would be given authority to determine their own and the mayor's salary. The council would gain certain powers now under the Board of Estimate and Taxation, and would have broadened legislative authority and powers for checking on the

administration. The mayor would be the executive head of the city and be directly responsible to the people for administration of city departments. Emphasis would be placed upon administration of city services through qualified career personnel.

No change is proposed in the composition of the city council, which would continue to be 13 aldermen elected from 13 wards. This is in spite of recommendations that a smaller council elected at large would be preferable or that a compromise be proposed which would continue 13 aldermen by wards but add 4 to be elected at large in the "off election" year. The points of view on each deserve special comment:

-13 man council elected by wards: This choice has the advantage of involving no change. It would allow the voters to concentrate on the central objective or more clear-cut responsibility and authority for legislation and administration without injecting confusion and controversy over a change in the way aldermen are to be selected. It was felt that this would simplify understanding of the proposed changes, reduce active opposition and result in a larger favorable vote on the amendment.

-A smaller council of 7, 9 or 11 aldermen elected at large: Under this arrangement part would be elected every two years for four year terms. Ideally, a council of 9 elected at large, 5 at one election and 4 two years later, has much to recommend it. This is because legislative matters are a concern of all of the people of the city and are best served from an overall point of view. However, the ward system is so much a part of Minneapolis tradition that it was considered inadvisable to introduce a change to a smaller council elected at large at this time. If such a proposal is to be made, it might better be presented separately at some later date. Moreover, the continuance of a 13-man council by wards would not seriously detract from the central objectives of separation of legislative and administrative responsibilities.

-13 elected by wards and 4 elected at large in the "off year": Such a strong belief in the desirability of electing all or part of the aldermen at large existed that this proposal was developed as a compromise between the above two alternatives. However, since the people voted recently to reduce the size of the council from 26 to 13, it seemed inadvisable to advance a recommendation which would involve an increase in the size of the council. Moreover, there were no clear convictions on the part of the majority of the committee that this compromise would prove of great practical value, and it could cause both confusion and opposition.

City Clerk: In many cities this office is considered to be administrative and is part of the administrative organization under the mayor. However, because the city clerk does have duties directly related to council responsibilities, it is proposed that he continue to be an appointee of the council. He would retain his duties as clerk of the city council and as head of the bureau of registration. But other duties now performed by the city clerk would be performed through the Department of Administration.

Research: Because the council needs professional help in research relating to legislation and to arrive at its own determination of the effectiveness of administration, specific provision is made for a staff reporting directly to the council.

Post-auditing: This is a function which serves as a check on the administration under the mayor and the chief administrative officer. It is considered to be desirable that the city council should be able to decide whether or not to rely solely on the State Public Examiner or to conduct or contract for post-auditing under its own direction.

School Board: The School Board would set its own tax levy subject to charter limitations and would otherwise continue its present independent position, except the city council would take over the Board of Estimate's authority to approve bond issues.

Library Board: The Library Board would set its own tax levy subject to charter limitations and would otherwise retain its independent position, except that the city council would have authority to review and approve of bond issues.

Park Board: Would continue to be elected as at present and would have independent powers to set its own tax levy within the limit set by the charter, but, as in the case of the school and library boards, would be subject to final approval by the city council for authorization of bond issues. From an administrative point of view much can be said for including a department of parks as one of the departments responsible to the chief administrative officer and to the mayor. However, many Minneapolis voters associate our better-than-average park system with its administration by an elected board with independent tax authority and it seems probable that some votes would be lost for a reorganization of city government by a change in these two elements of our park administration. It is quite possible, however, that assignment of parkway street maintenance to the new Department of Public Works for coordinated servicing along with city streets would meet voter approval. Also, many would see the logic of adding park police as a division of the city police department under the Department of Public Safety. Thus a charter amendment might well include these two changes, accompanied by a reassignment of millage to the city to cover the added cost of taking on these now non-integrated Park Board functions.

Department of Administration: As chief executive, the mayor has many leadership responsibilities: policy formulation, administration, ceremonial duties, representation of the city in its relations with other governments and with private groups. Administration of a city as large and complex as Minneapolis is a full-time job in itself and in recognition of this the trend in large cities is to give the mayor a top administrator to help him in his duties of planning, directing and coordinating administration. A chief administrative officer appointed by the mayor is proposed for this purpose. He would head the department of administration which would include a division of the budget and a division of personnel each headed by a director. The merit system would be retained and strengthened.

Department of Public Safety: Under these proposals the various divisions assigned to the protection of life and property are grouped for closer coordination as units in the Department of Public Safety. Minneapolis has been plagued by a turnover of police chiefs each time a new mayor has been elected. It is therefore important that police chiefs have some political immunity while at the same time they are held to account by the mayor for their record in office. For this reason it is proposed that the police chief be appointed for a fixed term not coincident with the term of the mayor and that other officials in the department hold office under civil service, or by appointment for a fixed term.

Department of Public Works: This department title is commonly used in other cities and fits the pattern of the other operating departments. The director would be a qualified engineer. The department functions would be the same as those now under the city engineer.

Department of Health and Welfare: Many members of the city council and those who have observed experience in other cities agree that city services relating to health and welfare should be coordinated under the financial and administrative controls provided for other departments. For this reason this department is created with a director directly accountable to the mayor. A Health and Hospitals Board is suggested, to act in an advisory capacity.

Finance Department: The title of comptroller is eliminated but the duties of the office are continued under the director of finance. Because the jobs of treasurer and purchasing agent are administrative and require technical qualifications difficult of appraisal by the voters, it was considered desirable that these two offices should become part of the Department of Finance. The creation of the department of finance to serve in coordination with the work of the budget director in the department of administration could result in an important advance in the planning, administration and control of city finances.

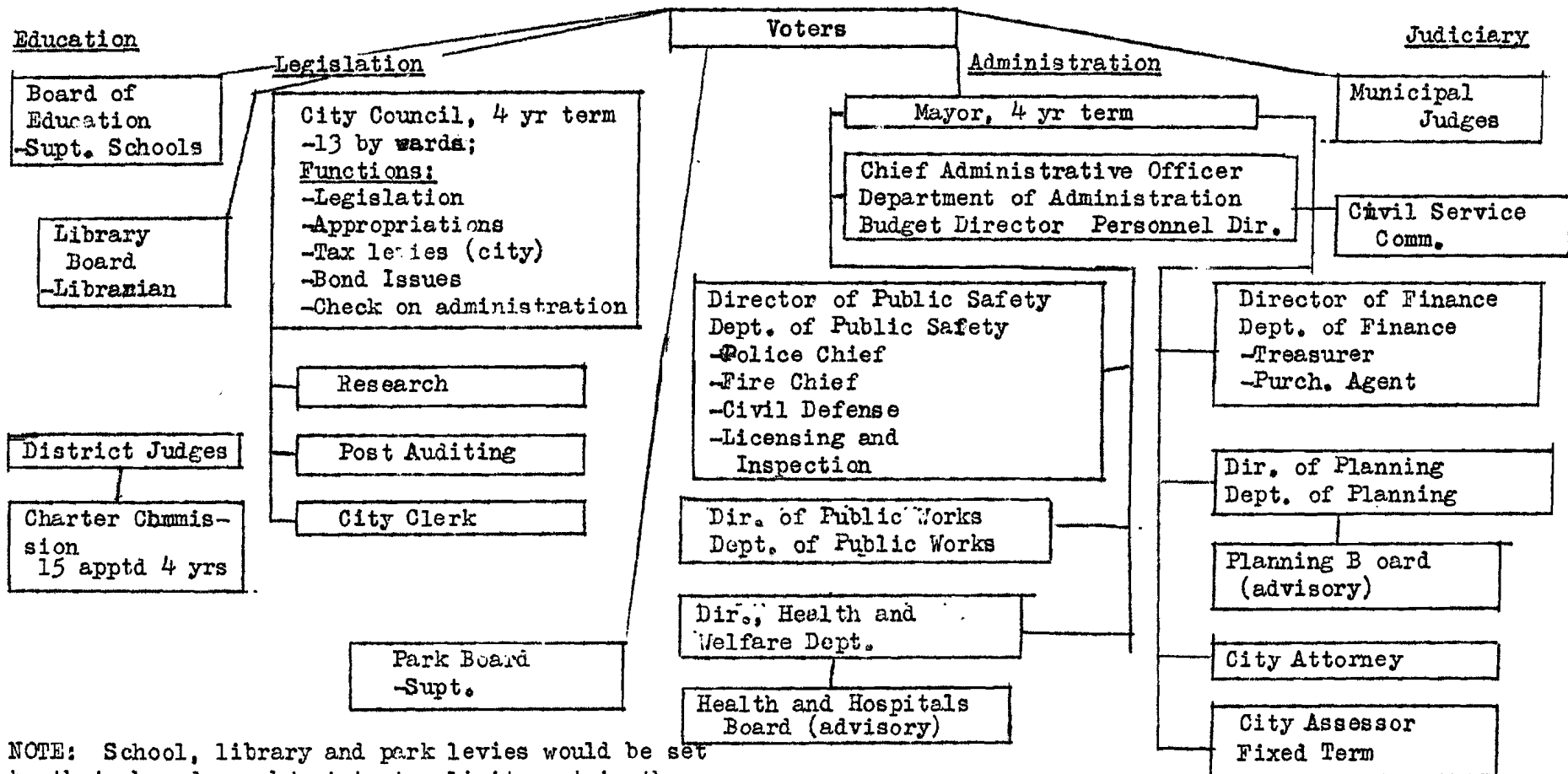
Department of Planning: It is in the area of planning that we have one of the clearest illustrations of the need for charter change. Planning should be continuous, both short term and long term, and the plans should be coordinated with all the other needs of the city. Planning should be an operating department of the city administration, with citizen representation through an advisory Planning Board. The director of planning should be well qualified and directly responsible to the mayor.

City Attorney: The city attorney's office has duties which relate to the duties of both the city council and the mayor. However, it was considered undesirable to have two departments. It was the majority belief that the most significant duties of the city attorney relate to law enforcement and to counseling in relation to the work of the administrative departments. It was felt that one or more members of the department could work closely with the council in the drafting of ordinances and whatever else might be of direct council concern. For these reasons a single department under a city attorney appointed by the mayor with the advice and consent of the city council was considered to be appropriate to the need.

City Assessor: The work of the city assessor is administrative in nature. He should be well qualified and of the highest integrity. Every effort should be made to free the office from political pressure. Although he should be appointed by the mayor with the advice and consent of the council, he should not be removable except for specified causes and should be appointed to serve for a fixed term. Consideration was given to making him part of the department of finance, but it seemed preferable to give him separate and almost independent status to further insulate him from political pressure.

Civil Service: No change is recommended at this time. This is because it is considered desirable to bring the question of changes in civil service to the voters in a separate amendment which can then be considered alone on its merits. It is recommended that until such time as civil service can be changed to allow department heads more choice in the selection of department officials, and to provide for some reasonable process of removal, that the interests of good administration will be served best by providing for the appointment of such officials for fixed terms. This would tend to reduce political turnover but help to assure responsible administration.

Minneapolis Government  
Reflecting proposed Charter Changes submitted for discussion



NOTE: School, library and park levies would be set by their boards, subject to tax limits set in the charter. City levies would be set by the council subject to charter limitation. Bond issues of the city and of the school, library and park boards would require council approval.

NOTE: The above 8 department heads would be appointed by the mayor with the advise and consent of the city council. The assessor would be appointed for a fixed term, but the other 7 would serve at the pleasure of the mayor. Top officials under the department heads would be appointed for fixed terms or serve under civil serve, F. E. P. C. and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority would continue as at present.