

NOT FOR RELEASE

Citizens League
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, MN 55402

October 7, 1976

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Government Structure Task Force, Greer E. Lockhart, Chairman

SUBJECT: Recommended position on Minneapolis city charter referendum

BACKGROUND

The issues presented by the proposed amendment offered this fall must be seen against the evolution in thinking about Minneapolis city government organization over the years.

1. Until 1920 the Minneapolis city charter was nothing but a collection of state laws, passed at various times, establishing its various functions and departments. It was a custom-made and unique form. It was like the rest of municipal government in most respects -- providing for a governing body, the City Council, to oversee the affairs of the city. But it established early a Mayor who was neither an administrative official nor a member of the City Council. Rather, the Office of Mayor was established with a charge to provide information to the City Council (a function that did not develop to any substantial extent), and to provide a review and check on City Council actions. Also, through the Mayor's service as a member of a multitude of city boards and commissions, it functioned as a coordinating link in a very diffuse system.

The existence of this office, set up not clearly either executive or legislative in function, has been, through the years, and is currently, the source of a large part of the difficulty and perplexity with the city government system.

2. In 1920, after several unsuccessful efforts to adopt a new form of city government, the Charter Commission proposed simply adopting all the existing state law into the form of a home rule charter. This the voters accepted. Nothing substantive was changed: The city simply established, from there on, the ability to make changes through voter action, rather than being required to return to the Legislature.
3. During the 1930s a proposed city manager form was briefly considered, but not adopted. The commission form, popular during the 1920s, and adopted in St. Paul and Duluth, seems not to have been seriously proposed for Minneapolis.
4. In the 1940s there developed an interest in the separation-of-powers model, with the responsibility for executive administration transferred to a "strong mayor." Essentially this was proposed in Minneapolis in 1948, 1960 and 1963. These proposals were defeated on all occasions, and -- at least so far as it involves the transfer of the administrative operations of the city from the City Council to the Mayor -- the "strong mayor" form has not been revived since 1963. The reason probably is that in the early 1960s, and undoubtedly stimulated by the charter revision proposals, the City Council began the development for the first time of real central professional management in the city service, with the establishment of the Office of City Coordinator.

5. From 1963 to 1973 the basic questions about city organization were essentially dormant. The City Council in this period was increasing its practice of going directly to the Legislature for minor changes in city government structure and procedures which might normally have been secured through the referendum process.
6. After 1969 the context in which the discussion about city government structure was carried on, markedly changed. With the improvement in city administration, due largely to the appearance of the Coordinator, the problem in city government came increasingly to be seen as a problem in making, rather than in executing decisions. The transfer of functions to the schools, to the county, and to the metropolitan level significantly altered the city's responsibilities. There was a substantial change in the pattern of issues with which the city government dealt. The job of the city was no longer basic housekeeping and limited regulation for its citizens -- but, more and more, the complex renewal and redevelopment of commercial, industrial and residential areas. After the debate over the zoning ordinance in 1963, and after the passage of the federal Model Cities legislation in 1966, a whole new structure of neighborhood and community organizations appeared, deeply involved with the city government in decisions about city development and city services. During this period, too, the practice of the Mayor participating personally as a member of the various boards and commissions was largely terminated.
7. This drastically altered situation found its way into the thinking about city government structure largely through a pair of studies conducted by the Citizens League, 1969-70, in committees chaired by James Weaver. These were committees formed to look at particular pressing problems in Minneapolis city government -- specifically, the question of the effectiveness of the system of planning and development, and the system of minority representation. They were not organized explicitly as studies of the proper form and structure of city government. Out of the committees' examination of these problems, however, came recommendations for structural changes. The most important for present purposes was the proposal in 1969 that, as the keystone of an effort to resolve the continuing problem in political leadership, there be a merger of the offices of Mayor and President of the City Council.

In the discussion about charter revision after 1969, then, two different concepts about city government organization were increasingly visible. The first was the earlier separation-of-powers model (although "strengthening the mayor" was coming increasingly to mean strengthening his legislative, rather than his executive, role). The second was the idea -- emerging from the Citizens League's 1969 report and proposal -- of, instead, a greater unification in city government, with the Mayor becoming clearly the leader of the governing body.

8. The distinction began to emerge as the new Charter Commission, appointed in 1974, moved to initiate a package of amendments for voter approval. In the fall of 1974 the Commission proposed four amendments which included most importantly a clarification of the Mayor's authority to approve or veto all actions of the City Council, and authorization for the Mayor to play a leadership role in the preparation of the annual budget and physical development plan and program. These proposed amendments were supported by the Citizens League, even though they did not deal with the fundamental question of the Office of Mayor in the city system. The first of the two amendments referred-to was approved, the latter failed.

9. Discussion was resumed in 1976, with the two concepts continuing to sharpen. The discussion was stimulated, and somewhat changed from two years before, by the visible difficulties then occurring, with the system to which the City Council had moved in the 1960s -- that is, of having the City Coordinator take the principal leadership role in major questions of finance and development. With respect to the central question of Mayor/Council/staff relationships, the Charter Commission renewed without substantial change its so-called "planning and budgeting" amendment. The Citizens League, in a statement to the Commission July 7, strongly urged that any amendment dealing with the strengthening of citywide policy leadership this year come to grips with the fundamental question of the Mayor/Council relationship: specifically, as proposed in the League's 1969 report, by creating a single policy-leadership office. This proposal attracted substantially greater interest and support than in previous years, both within and outside the Charter Commission. The Commission, however, held to its original plan, and has resubmitted the "planning and budgeting" amendment for voter action November 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We urge the voters of Minneapolis to vote "No" on the planning and budgeting amendment proposed by the Charter Commission.

We make this recommendation with considerable reluctance, and only after intensive consideration of the issues involved. The Citizens League has a long history of support for efforts to change and improve the structure of Minneapolis city government, and specifically under the general heading -- in use again this year -- of 'strengthening the role of the Mayor.' We agree with the Charter Commission that the critical, central need in Minneapolis government is for stronger policy leadership, by an elected official. And the League joined with the Commission two years ago, in supporting some steps in this direction.

We urge disapproval for the following reasons:

- * In thinking through these issues this year, in the different situation that exists, and in greater depth than we did in 1974, we find a fundamental area of difference with what the Commission is now proposing. It turns around what is to us the central importance of reducing the policy-leadership positions in city government down to one, and positioning that office in the structure so its occupant -- the Mayor -- is both enabled and required to be involved and effective with the City Council.

We do not support a proposal which leaves the Office of Mayor essentially as it is, independent both of the administrative activity of the departments and agencies and of the policy-making of the City Council.

- * The central conclusion of the Citizens League's 1969 study of the problem, and the central recommendation of our report, is that the strengthening of the Office of Mayor should occur as a part of a basic reorganization that brings the Mayor into the governing body and resolves at last the confusion over the responsibility for policy leadership in city government. This would not be accomplished by the amendment now proposed.
- * The amendment proposed by the Charter Commission moves essentially on the separation-of-powers model -- leaving in place, as it does, the two separate

offices of Mayor and Council President. It is reasonable to believe that, if the city starts down the road of enlarging the staff and responsibilities of the Mayor, with the office structured as it now is, a return to the concept of greater unification in the system is unlikely. The city should, therefore, see itself this fall as at a significant point of decision, in the direction it is moving with the development of its governmental system.

- * No real sense of direction, however, no larger plan or design for the future of Minneapolis city government exists as a basis for the amendments being offered by the Charter Commission. Indeed (with the sole exception of the Citizens League studies, 1969-70), there has not been a substantial and in-depth examination of the changed problems and responsibilities of Minneapolis city government, and of what these imply for its organization over the next several decades, in more than 15 years. We raise no objections to a piecemeal approach to the revision of the city government system. But we do believe there must be some clear concept, at least in general terms, of the arrangement toward which these changes are moving. This could be the separation-of-powers, strong mayor model. Or it could be the model we have advocated, which is in use most generally in municipal government in Minnesota, in which the Mayor participates in the work of the City Council. It could also be a model in which the Office of Mayor continues to exist, alternatively, as a kind of fully-staffed advisory body, never becoming truly either executive or legislative. Whatever the model, it should be spelled out, and adequately defended. Without some such concept of the direction in which change is moving, the amendment now proposed must be regarded as seriously defective.

- * Fundamentally, we have concluded that a sound, positive solution to the problem of citywide policy leadership in Minneapolis government -- proposed by the League and others again this year -- is available, and implementable at an early date. Compared to this, the enlargement of the Office of Mayor, in the manner proposed by the Charter Commission, raises some real concerns. It will, as we have noted, produce a double structure of policy leadership. It may also produce a double structure of city staff. Contrary to what may be the general impression, it is not clear that the charter amendment can effectively transfer the planning responsibility or budgeting responsibility from the City Council to the Mayor. It can, to be sure, establish -- as the proposed amendment would -- a planning office and a budgeting office under the Mayor. But it cannot disestablish the office of City Coordinator, which exists under the City Council, or prevent the City Council from re-establishing (under whatever name) essentially these functions and staffs under its own direction and supervision.

Defeat of the amendment now proposed, and a continuation of the serious discussion about the direction of city government reorganization over the next two years would, then, on balance, not be harmful. It should, on the contrary, be constructive. The present proposal is not the kind of massive change that can be generated only once every 10 or 15 years. Laying it aside this fall would not interrupt the continuing effort to restructure the city government system, piece by piece, at every biennial election. There is every reason to expect that, after further discussion, a substantial and improved amendment could be on the ballot in 1978, if not 1977.

This would give the city time for the kind of critical rethinking of the way in which city government should be organized, for the problems it now has to face, that so far has not taken place.

2. We recommend that the Charter Commission organize and undertake, at the earliest opportunity, with the funds it is authorized by the city charter, a broad and in-depth examination and discussion of the problems and responsibilities likely to lie on Minneapolis government over the next 10 or 20 years, and the changes in city government structure required to handle these problems and responsibilities effectively. The Citizens League will participate actively in any such review -- as, we are sure, will other interested and affected groups seriously concerned about the future of this largest central city in the Twin Cities region.