

Comment

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To: Charter Board <CharterBoard@charlescountymd.gov>

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Charter is heading toward a slippery slope.

Now, a lot of good proposed details, but so far there are only three key benefits; Term Limits, Office of Inspector General, and some better accountability. Some of the heavy downside factors include; no language prohibiting police force appointed by the Executive (should reference State law), too few Council members so only 3 and the Exec can run everything (we need 9 members and super majority defined as 6 votes, then it takes 6 to control), too much unjustified additional cost for the huge salaries and staff, provision for replacement member vacancy limited to a member of the same political party (eliminates 50% of eligible candidates), not a provision for a simple public referendum, specific addressing permits and zoning issues.

The county budget is about 50% to the Board of Education, another 25% to the Sheriff's Dept, and about 8% in pre-authorized items. Soooo, do we really need a full time Council and their staff to do legislative work year-round for the remaining 17%? Makes no sense. Should be 9 Part-time, NON-PARTISAN, with small staff, because we need more direct citizen input to the Council members. We have 9 Non-Partisan, part-time School Board members overseeing 50% of the budget, then why not similar for the Council over only 17% of the budget and Legislative issues?

Why do I so strongly favor a 9 Member (2 per District and 1 at-large), non-partisan, part-time Council?

First, it mirrors the School Board makeup, so it's easy to understand.

Next, everyone knows the County can be, and very often is, run and controlled currently by only 3 people (majority of 5), with only accountability on Election Day. If we only have a Council of 5, then a majority of 3 plus the Executive only creates a 4 person control cabal. However, with a 9 member Council, and defining a super majority of 6, that would mean 6, even without the Executive, would equal 6 necessary to exert the same level of control we now have with 3. So, the checks and balances double from the 3 currently to 6 and that, with the separation of the Executive and Legislative, will address today's and future issues with a substantial prudent approach.

Much of the accountability issues we desperately need to address will be practically self-correcting with a 6 vote requirement.

Why do I urge a Non-Partisan Council just like the School Board? Primarily, it demonstrates a sincere desire for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness of opportunity, regardless of party affiliation or non-affiliation. Also it means any need to replace a member vacancy would be open to ALL qualified applicants, rather than just a member of a given party.

Bottom line, Charter MUST prove to the citizens that it is significantly better than current Commissioners. Voters need to be concerned or fed up enough by the negative consequences and convinced enough by the positive benefits in order to make a change.

I wrote the proposed Preamble for this Charter and I sincerely hope its tenets are truly incorporated into it.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Crawford
Charter Board, Alternate member