

FW: Comment

Charter Board <CharterBoard@charlescountymd.gov>

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From: Jim Crawford • [REDACTED]

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Subject: Comment

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The Charter must be adequate for now and allow for future growth.

In 2000 the Form of Government Committee recommended going to Code Home Rule, which easily passed because it represented a logical step in the growth of the County, when population at that time was only 120,000 and growing. With the estimated growth in mind it also recommended going to 5 Commissioners from the previous 3 and later that was approved.

Forward to 2014 with a population of 150,000 and time to consider Charter. But that failed and I believe it was due to 3 major factors. First it appeared to give too much power to the Executive with not enough oversight by a Council. Second, it did not adequately consider the long term effects of our constant rapid growth. Additionally, the public input to the process, and public awareness was sorely lacking.

Today we are a County of about 180,000 and still growing rapidly. What will Charles look like 10, 15, or 20 years from now?

The 2024 proposed Charter needs:

- 1) Checks and Balances between the County Executive, County Council, and the Public, including term limits;
- 2) Balanced power between the Executive and Council, esp. for Budget, Taxes, and Hiring;
- 3) Create an independent Office of Inspector General with appropriate powers;
- 4) It should define a clear, simple, and reasonable method for a public referendum on unpopular actions. Signature requirements should not be more than 5% of registered voters and open for 120 days;
- 5) 9 Part-time Council Members with a limited, shared Full-time staff;

The School Board receives nearly 50% of the county budget, and as such its operating model should be the model for the County Council as well.

A larger Council will give citizens greater access for their input and getting responses. And like the School Board, making the Council non-partisan will open the candidacy opportunity to all citizens;

- 6) The Council should require a Super Majority for major actions and define it as requiring six (6) votes for over-riding county executive veto, county executive appointments and removals, etc., and
- 7) Salaries and Benefits, including perks, of the Executive and Council need to be defined and explicit.

Let me also explain why I strongly favor a 9 Member, non-partisan, part-time Council. First, it mirrors the School Board makeup, so it's easy to understand.

Second, everyone knows the County can be, and often is, run and controlled currently by only 3 people. If we only have a Council of 5, then a majority of 3 plus the Executive only creates a 4 person control factor. However, with a 9 member Council, and defining a quorum requiring 8 members, that would mean a majority of 5 plus the Executive would equal 6 necessary to exert the same level of control. 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.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Crawford
Charter Board, Alternate member