

Critical Decisions for Charter Commissions

by Dr. Susan Hannah

Outline of Presentation

1. Guiding Principles
 - A. Democratic values
 1. Popular sovereignty
 2. Limited government
 3. Individual rights
 4. Direct election – representation
 5. Divided power
 6. Responsible involvement
 - B. Effective government
 1. Responsible
 2. Accountable
 - C. Home Rule
 1. Home Rule Act
 2. State powers
 3. Neighboring governments
 4. Local uniqueness
2. Key Decisions
 - A. Structure of government
 1. Council-Manager
 2. Strong Mayor-Council
 3. Weak Mayor-Council
 - B. Officers
 1. Mayor
 2. Council
 3. Clerk
 4. Attorney

5. Treasurer
 6. Assessor
 7. Board of Review
- C. Mayor
1. Selection: director or council election
 2. Powers: type of government – strong vs. weak
- D. Council
1. Size
 2. Election
 - a. partisan vs. nonpartisan
 - b. Wards vs. at-large
 - c. Petition vs. affidavit
 - d. Time – Spring vs. Fall; odd vs. even
 - e. Terms – 2 vs. 4 years; staggered
 3. Qualifications
 4. Duties
 5. Compensation – salary commission option
 6. Vacancies – appointment vs. election
 7. Recall
- E. Other officers
1. Selection
 2. Powers
- F. Municipal Powers
1. Public peace, etc.
 2. Intergovernmental contracts
- G. Taxation
1. Subjects
 2. Limits
 3. Collection

- H. Ordinances
 - 1. Adopting, amending, repealing
 - 2. Publication
 - 3. Initiative and Referendum
- I. Council Sessions
 - 1. Procedures
 - 2. Notice
 - 3. Journal
- J. Budgets
 - 1. System of Accounts
 - 2. Adoption procedure
- K. Special Assessments
- L. Administrative Organization
 - 1. Central authority
 - 2. Powers of manager
 - 3. Departments
 - 4. Administrative Code
- M. Advisory Boards
 - 1. Selection
 - 2. Powers
- 3. New Ideas
 - A. Sunset provisions
 - B. Citizen involvement
 - C. Code of Ethics
 - D. Ombudsman
 - E. Dispute Resolution
 - F. Strategic planning process
 - G. Environmental concerns
 - H. Economic development
 - I. Relations to other units of government

4. Characteristics of a Good Charter
 - A. Simple language
 - B. Logical structure
 - C. Consistent
 - D. Specific references
 - E. Brief
 - F. Gender neutral
 - G. Local “fit”
 - H. Discretion to council
 - I. Room to grow

5. Models
 - A. Model City Charter, 7th Edition – National Civic League
 - B. Other Michigan Charters – Michigan Municipal League

Results of the 1992 Survey of Michigan Charter Commissions

Characteristics of Charter Commissions

Age	51-60	Median Age
Race	98%	White
Gender	74%	Male
Education	61%	College or more
Occupation	49%	Manager or professional
	28%	Retired
Income	52%	\$41,000 or more
Residents	68%	20 years or more
Activities	66%	Community organizations
	44%	Public board/commission
Party	52%	Republican
	35%	Independent
	11%	Democratic

How Charter Commissions Work

Procedures	69%	Adopt own
Committees	65%	Committee of the Whole
	34%	Subcommittee
Meetings	47%	Biweekly
	24%	Monthly
	20%	Weekly
Compensation	79%	No compensation
Budget	47%	No budget
	40%	\$5,000 or less
	4%	\$6,000 - \$10,000
	6%	\$11,000 - \$25,000
	3%	\$25,000 or more
Funding	93%	City or village

Commission Resources

Top-ranked Resources	88%	City Attorney
	80%	City Clerical Staff
	50%	City Manager
Research Tasks	46%	Members
	23%	Attorney
Clerical Tasks	55%	City staff
	27%	Members
Drafting	32%	Attorney
	26%	Members
Public Relations	62%	Members
Research Resources	87%	Survey other cities
	85%	Model City Charter
	83%	Mich. Municipal League
Access to Needed Information	74%	Agree

Public Participation

Public Input	73%	Informal contacts
	55%	Public hearings
	52%	Invited speakers
	33%	Citizen letters
	29%	Citizen phone calls
	25%	Letters to the Editor
Informing the Public	49%	Press releases
	37%	Progress reports
	28%	Radio/TV
	25%	Presentations
Campaign Support	50%	City Council
	35%	City employees
	30%	City officials
	25%	Business/community groups
Participation Index	5.1	Commission #12
	12.3	Commission #15
Public Participation	16%	Satisfactory

Cooperation and Conflict

Commission Work	84%	Good leadership
	77%	Easy to work with
	77%	Easy consensus
	17%	Personal conflicts
	10%	Dissenting reports
	8%	Conflict with community groups
Controversial Topics	37%	Agree
	35%	Disagree
Conflict Index	6.1	Commission #16
	15.2	Commission #12

Substantive Issues
(by percent checked)

Powers of manager	63%
Powers of council	59%
Structure of government	52%
Powers of mayor	46%
Selection of clerk	43%
Residency for elected officials	36%
Employee residency	36%
Length of council terms	35%
Purchasing/bidding	34%
Millage limits	33%

Personal Perceptions

Learned about local government	82%
Opportunity to advance point of view	80%
Met interesting people	78%
Enjoyed developing solutions	77%
Enjoyed public attention	39%
Furthered own political plans	27%
Represented a constituency	25%
Overall evaluation	45% Very positive
	9% Neutral
	4% Negative

Dr. Susan Hannah

Dr. Susan Hannah received her BA from Agnes Scott College, has her MA in social science from Harvard University, and her PhD in political science from Michigan State University. She served as associate dean of arts and sciences and assistant vice president for academic affairs at Western Michigan University. Dr. Hannah is associate professor in the school of public affairs and public administration. Currently, Dr. Hannah serves as Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne. Her teaching and research publications are in state and local government and in administration, especially in charter development and intergovernmental relations. She has served on five charter review and study committees, chaired two, and advised others.