

OBSERVATIONS AT THE COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION (CRC)

January 16, 2013 meeting

LWV observer: Lynda Mayer

Cuyahoga County's Charter Review Commission is hard at work, hearing many suggestions for possible Charter amendments. They expect to hold a few more meetings of official input before they take their initial ideas on the road for citizen comment. A formal report to County Council is expected by July, after which Council will deliberate as to whether some or all should go on the Fall 2012 ballot. Here are some key issues CRC members are looking at so far:

1. Making the Inspector General into an independent Charter position, with ethics-enforcing teeth through guaranteed funding, protection against Executive or Council removal without cause, and subpoena power.
2. Better defining the appointive office of Law Director and differentiating its duties clearly from those of the elected Prosecutor. One councilperson even argued that the Prosecutor should also be made into an appointive Attorney-General-like officer.
3. Clarifying somehow the status of the Public Defender, currently hired & staffed by a commission.
4. Removing the Clerk of Courts from the aegis of the County's executive branch by having that office appointed by administrative judges instead.
5. Clarifying the authority to appoint and remove the Sheriff. And there are still a few voices saying that the Sheriff ought to be elective again.
6. Clarifying the role of the Human Resource Commission [*a 3-member panel which adjudicates personnel disputes within the executive departments*] and its relationship to the Exec, the Council, and the HR Department.
7. Removing the requirement that only 2 of each 3-member Hearing Board [*of the Board of Revisions: they hear requests to lower real estate assessed valuations*] may be of the same political party. In fact, some are arguing that there should be NO minority party set-asides in the Charter at all. [*The CRC itself must consist of 4 non-Democrats out of 9.*]
8. Improving the several methods of how to fill vacancies in the offices of County Executive, County Councilperson, Prosecutor, and even the most key appointive department and office heads.

[Observer note: There are also a few more items of a technical or semantic nature, which do not excite much discussion. It is likely that there will be a few more key issues raised as well, as the CRC enters into its last weeks of taking official testimony. Citizens and groups are invited to make public comment at meetings, submit their ideas for change, and later to attend road-show meetings held around the County for the purpose of getting public input, reactions and feedback. Meetings are all posted on the Charter Review Commission web page, which can be accessed from the Cuyahoga County government website or the LWV Cuyahoga Area website's county government page.]