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*Opponents say Akron commission's ideas work against what public stated in elections*

## Foes blister charter proposals

By Stephanie Warsmith  
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*Undemocratic.*

That sums up how opponents view the changes Akron's Charter Review Commission has recommended.

"Is it the intent of the commission, council and the mayor who appointed the commission to greatly limit the power of the people and create more of a dictator form of government?" asked Patti Longville, who was among about 20 people who attended a public hearing Wednesday on the proposed changes.

The commission, appointed every 10 years to review the city's charter, recommended to the Akron City Council last month that 14 sections of the charter be changed. Some of the changes are major, like removing campaign finance limits; others are minor, such as acknowledging the city's Economic Development Department.

The City Council must decide by Sept. 3 which proposals should be put before voters in the Nov. 2 election.

Several people spoke against proposals that would greatly increase the number of signatures required to get initiatives, referendums and charter changes on the ballot by tying the requirement to the number of registered voters in the city, rather than the number who actually voted in the most recent municipal election.

John Fuller said voters already have spoken on issues like the contribution limits approved in 1998 and last year's failed recall attempt against Mayor Don Plusquellic.

"This appears to be more about the usurping of the voting public," he said. "That would be a real travesty."

Greg Coleridge, director of the local American Friends Service Committee, said the proposed changes would put the city "under a deeper moat of the executive branch" while weakening the council.

He suggested that all of the recommendations be replaced with one proposal: a charter review commission that is elected, rather than appointed by the mayor. He said the commission then would act in the interest of the public, not the administration.

Willie Smith, who led the successful campaign in 2008 for a charter amendment requiring voter approval before the sale or lease of any city-owned utility, objected to a proposal that would say that requirement applies only to water and sewer systems. He said that wasn't the intent of the language.

"There was no mistake in the way this was written. It does not need to be revised," Smith said. "The city of Akron — the people — this was their wishes."

Vicki Armstrong said campaign finance limits should remain in the charter. The commission recommended stripping the limits and requiring the council to pass a new campaign finance ordinance.

Armstrong pointed to the large number of people who ran for the council last year, and the new members who were elected, as evidence the limits are working. "It is a myth that this charter needs changing," she said.

Council members wanted to hear from the public before deciding how to proceed.

"We wanted to hear what they've got to say," said council President Marco Sommerville.

Sommerville said he's not sure whether the council will try to tackle the charter changes next week — the last before the council's August break — or have a special meeting to address the issue. He said he doesn't know whether there's enough support on the council for the commission's recommendations.

Voters also might see a charter proposal on the ballot that neither the commission nor the council recommended.

Former Councilman Ernie Tarle is circulating petitions for a charter change requiring public comment periods during the council's committee and regular meetings.

Tarle commended council members Tuesday for allowing the first half-hour public comment period before Monday's council meeting.

"Why don't you save me and my friends some time and put this on the ballot?" Tarle asked, referring his proposal.

When Tarle's three minutes to speak ran out, he asked for "another second." Sommerville denied his request.

"I hope they make it permanent," Tarle said of the public comment period. "We will see that they do."


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