

Testimony before Akron City Council Regarding Akron City Charter Review Commission Recommendations

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The proposed changes to Akron's charter by the hand-picked Charter Review Commission on Campaign Finance Reform; Procedure; Initiative and referendum; Sale, Lease or Transfer of City Utilities; Purchasing agent, Board of Control; Amending the charter, and Periodic Charter Review all share one common trait – they reduce the power of citizens and/or city council and increase the power of the mayor and the administration.

These proposals consolidate even greater authority in the executive branch – changing in some cases what's been in Akron's constitution for many decades. They place even more power at the very top. This isn't about a person. It's about a principle. It's about political accountability where citizens in 2010 should have a greater direct democratic voice in the decisions effecting their neighborhoods and city, not less.

These proposals place a wider and deeper moat around the executive branch – further insulating and shielding itself from the public who will have a harder time to directly make laws, reverse laws, amend the charter and be heard if they lack money. Council itself will be weakened as well.

These proposals from the hand-picked Charter Review Commission should not appear on the ballot. In their place should be a single proposal – to replace the process of a hand-picked Charter Review Commission with an elected commission – one member per ward. Mansfield, Ohio, hardly a bastion of radicalism, has elected charter review commission members for over 20 years.

Elected charter review commission members by ward would better serve the interests of citizens. They would be beholden to those who elected them – in the same way that the hand-picked charter review commission has served very well the interests of the administration.

The final report of revisions to Akron's charter from an elected and publicly accountable charter review commission would look very different than this one. It would expand in many ways the power of citizens, not contract it. And it would increase the voices of Akron citizens without big money in elections, not decrease them.

Recommendations from that kind of group would be legitimate. Most of these are not and should not be placed on the ballot.

Thank you for your kind consideration.