Minneapolis Charter Commission
Public Hearing
Summary of Comments

May 18, 2005
Folwell Park, Minneapolis, MN

The public hearing was called to order at 7:04 p.m.
Commissioner Gary Thaden was in the Chair.
Charter Commissioners Present: Thaden, Lazarus, Clegg, Bujold, Theurer, Dziedzic, Lichty, Ponsford

Chair Thaden explained that the Minneapolis Charter Commission received a request from the Minneapolis City Council's Intergovernmental Relations Committee to hold several public hearings to receive comments on structure of the government of Minneapolis (noting the written format for questions that was made available at the meeting). He noted that four written communications had been received and were before the Commission and they would be placed on the record for the hearing.

Patricia Kovel-Jarboe, Minneapolis League of Women Voters (MLWV), speaking on behalf of the League and on her own behalf as a long-time resident of Minneapolis. The MLWV would like to see more meetings to discuss the subject of the Minneapolis Charter. A study of the history of charter changes shows that dialogue with the citizens during the process is very important; people need to understand proposed changes thoroughly. She noted that the Legislature was considering the formation of a study commission to look at the Charter. She also noted the MLWV own study of government that is underway with more information to be included in June. The MLWV works directly with citizens with a strong emphasis on education – particularly new residents; they would look forward to holding their own forums. Also, they have heard that the Charter Commission is looking at Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). The Minnesota League of Women Voters has taken a position in support of IRV and the Minneapolis League would tend to follow that endorsement but only with adequate citizen education.

Thaden mentioned that the MLWV Website has good information relating to voting and options.

Bruce Lundeen was called but was not present.

Tina Sanz, 4941 37th Av S, addressed the Commission. She has questions about any change that would affect the power of the Mayor and Council. She would advocate for the power structure to remain the same in order to continue a system that gives good citizen participation. She would like to see the boards (Library, Park and Estimate & Taxation) remain independent. There has been department raiding at all levels of City government and she would loathe seeing that happening to our park or library system.

Anita Duckor, Library Board member and resident at 3141 Dean Court, read a prepared statement. She noted legislative history – the creation of the City Charter, the Park and Recreation Board and then the Library Board all by the State Legislature. Over the years, various amendments and changes have caused for something of a confusing Charter situation. There have been proposals to change the independent boards and each time that has occurred, the Minneapolis Library Board of Trustees has gone on record in support of maintaining the independent board structure and that has not changed. The Library supports the continuation of an independent and elected Board. It is time for the Commission to take a full and detailed look at the City Charter to ensure that it provides for an efficient, effective and accountable city government as the residents deserve. Seeking public input is commendable and the ideas of the public must be taken into consideration as the Commission proceeds with it goal of streamlining the Charter.

Commissioner Lazarus noted that there are no plans at this point to change the independent board structure.

Commissioner Lichty, on the area of roles and responsibilities, asked independent board members who were present if they are opposed to any changes at all? Would they oppose changes intended to simplify the Charter document?

Ms. Duckor said the Library Board has stated support for changes that wouldn't affect roles and responsibilities. To be clear, however, some areas that others think are minor have been seen as more significant by the Board.

Rod Krueger, Library Board member and resident at 4828 28th Av S, addressed the Commission, noting that he was speaking as private citizen and not officially representing the Library Board. He believes that Minneapolis' local government is responsive to citizens with its independent board system. The Library Board's independence allows it to operate facilities as it deems necessary – keeping the operations under direct citizen control. The Library Board takes that role very seriously. Further, elected boards are not unusual. He supports the retained independence of all the boards.

Commissioner Lazarus suggested that it is important for everyone to understand that, on a separate track, the Charter Commission is trying to get public input on updating a very outdated charter document with the goal of changing the Charter to benefit the citizens of the City. Part of the problem is that over the years there has been politics mixed into the Charter – making some things Charter-controlled rather than ordinance-controlled and that has caused some controversy. He believes the mission of the Charter Commission is to clean up the Charter – not to implement a diabolic or evil plan.

An announcement was made that there would be another hearing at Lynnhurst Park on Wednesday, May 25 at 7:00 p.m.

The hearing was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Minneapolis Charter Commission
Public Hearing
Summary of Comments

May 25, 2005
Lynnhurst Park, Minneapolis, MN

The public hearing was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chair Jim Bernstein.
Charter Commissioners Present: Bernstein, Ferrara, Lazarus, Melendez, Ponsford, Thaden.

Chair Bernstein explained that the Minneapolis Charter Commission received a request from the Minneapolis City Council's Intergovernmental Relations Committee to hold several public hearings to receive comments on structure of the government of Minneapolis. Comments will be reported back to the City Council. He added that the Commission will not be discussing any changes but is standing only to receive comments at this hearing.

Ann Pugliese, Minneapolis League of Women Voters (MLWV), addressed the Commission. She noted that the League has done research during the past year for their publication entitled, "Minneapolis Government – A Balancing Act", including sponsoring a public forum. The publication should be released after being reviewed at the League's June 22nd Board meeting. The League hopes to have more opportunity for input on the subject of the Charter after that time. The League strongly believes in the citizen's right to know and in facilitating citizen participation in decision making. They support a responsive and efficient government structure for Minneapolis. Based on study, what they believe is needed in good government – accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity, accessibility, flexibility, cost effectiveness, diversity and sustainability. Generally, the questions they would ask about any amendment – does it meet a need, does it address future growth, does it simplify the structure, does it define authority, does it lead to separation or advocacy at the Legislature, does it coordinate, and does it provide checks and balances? Also, they would ask if changes are what are needed during the current times of reduced revenue. What would engage more citizens? What will best serve the City for the future? She asked when the Commission will be holding the next public hearing (Chair Bernstein said he anticipates two more hearings – probably in August or September – there would be no changes anticipated for the ballot this year.)

Bruce Lundeen, 2620 Stevens Av S (see written comments submitted). Mr. Lundeen noted that he would like access to entire City Charter via the Web; he has only been able to access a consolidated version. He believes that the concern about the City Charter at the state level is spurred by a money shortage. He thinks that the state is looking to save money and would like to make big cuts to Minneapolis. Considering the size of the Minnesota government work force compared to the City, however, suggests that the cuts would have to come at the state level. He is concerned about the redrawing of ward lines the affect that has upon representatives of color; he does not support a reduction in the number of wards. He does not like the concept of having a city manager and would not like the number of wards to be reduced. He recognizes that the power to change really lies with the State Legislature. He noted the drop in police complaints with the new Police Chief. He also mentioned concern about the state of education in the City and suggested that the Minneapolis Board of Education should be changed.

Donald Bellfield, 3749 Garfield Av S, addressed the Commission, including identifying himself as a candidate for the City Council, Ward 8. He supports a stronger Mayor government in Minneapolis and a part-time 26 ward City Council to achieve more diverse representation. The Board of Estimate and Taxation should probably be moved under the City Treasurer, and the Park and Library should become City departments, as well as the schools.

John Hartwig, 3228 Humboldt Av S. Mr. Hartwig said he has lived in Miami, Florida and fears Minneapolis is moving toward the same type of government. That city and Philadelphia, with a city manager system, both have high murder rates. He is also concerned that there is a law that requires a referendum for any public funding for a stadium but that is being ignored. He wouldn't support more power in the hands of a few people.

Walter Dziedzic, Northeast Minneapolis, Park Board Commissioner. The best thing that Minneapolis has going for it is its parks, with a fantastic system and facilities close to every home. He recalled a couple of past Charter amendments – an appropriate change that allowed the City Health Department to be headed by an administrator rather than a doctor and another that went to a ballot that would have reduced the size of the City Council but failed. He thinks the current structure of the Park Board is the best form of representation with six districts and three at-large representatives. Independence of the boards is the right way to go because citizens benefit from that structure.

Nancy Lehrman, 3604 Harriet Av. (35 year resident of Minneapolis). Spoke in support of Instant Runoff Voting for the city council and mayoral elections. The process would bring more citizen participation.

Tony Solgard, 2509 34th Av S, president of Fair Vote Minnesota, an organization that educates the public on alternative voting methods. Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is an identified fairer approach. Greater democracy can come from better voting methods. IRV allows for more minority input.

David Weinlick, 5941 Sheridan Av S, Board Member of Fair Vote Minnesota, and involved in organization called Getting to the Bottom of the Ballot. Instant Runoff Voting helps to encourage people to come out and vote. On the question of changing independent boards, the concept would have to be presented to the public in an understandable way and a way that is clear the citizens as to who will be representing them.

Natalie Westreich, 1779 Emerson Av S. If the Park Board were to be taken over by the City, the risk would be that a great treasure could be lost. The idea of aligning districts is different and perhaps more favorable.

Sook Laird, 1802 McKnight St NE, noted that the biggest reason she chooses to live in Minneapolis is the park system.

John Villerius, 4732 14th Av S. (See written comments)

Sara Janousek, 1916 Fremont Av S. Noting a page in a League of Women Voters publication, Ms. Janousek pointed out that the City appears to be represented at the State Legislature by six to eight different lobbyists – one for the City Council, one for the Mayor, one for the Park Board, etc. The City needs to present a united front. She likes a strong Mayor and one City Council but the most important priority needs to be to work together at all levels of government. She is concerned about the new one-call system – it's a bad idea to take the calls of the citizens away from the elected officials. She is opposed to the concept of Instant Runoff Voting because it is too complicated.

Lisa McDonald, 4241 E Lake Harriet Pkwy. She has been on the City Council and is running again; despite that, she supports a strong mayor system. Looking at how that works for St. Paul, she sees that it attracts a strong leader. She doesn't support the city manager system, although that system can work better for smaller governments. She wants citizens to have access to their elected officials and bureaucracy can increase with a city manager system. She would support a change to a nine-member, full-time City Council, in recognition of the decrease in population. The effort with the 311 call system is based on centralizing service, however, she believes there will always be a need for people to speak directly with their elected officials.

Rosie Turner, 4451 Vincent Av S. She has worked in the private sector and, based on her experience there, she thinks there should be a strong Mayor that takes responsibility for all of the government.

Lisa Boyd, 3618 E 38th St. Member of Green Party (not necessarily speaking on their behalf). Spoke in support of Instant Runoff Voting. The Greens believe in local representation; she likes the Park Board. Concentration of power ends up with the result of less democracy.

Bob Fine, 3932 York Av S, life-long resident of Minneapolis and member of Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. His agenda is to maintain the independence of the Park Board. Looking at the history of the park system, it was set up by the State and with an eye toward protection. Ours is a nationally recognized and respected park system. Our 49 staffed neighborhood centers are unmatched. It is a source of great pride to the residents and a feature that attracts and keeps people here.

Commissioner Ferrara mentioned the other track of study for the Charter Commission, namely the revision that they have worked on for over a year. He noted that he would welcome any comments on that element also.

Jennifer Ringold, 4233 40th Av S, City resident and Park Board employee. She feels somewhat biased about the City park system because she is an employee, however, she can speak with experience from working in a different situation where parks were a part of the city system. That system didn't provide the protection that comes with an independent board. She is passionate about the Minneapolis park system and it is the reason she chooses to live here.

Julie Bartell
Clerk of the Charter Commission