

Ramsey County Charter Commission  
Public Hearing  
Monday, May 14, 2012

The Ramsey County Charter Commission held a public hearing to obtain testimony from the public regarding the following issue: *Should the Ramsey County Home Rule Charter be amended so that a salary ordinance increasing Commissioner's salaries by more than two percent (2%) per annum shall be subject to an automatic referendum to be held at the next general election?*

The hearing was held in the Council Chambers of the Ramsey County Court House, 15 West Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102, and was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Chair Bob Benke, with the following members present:

	<u>Members Present:</u>	<u>Members Absent:</u>
District 1:	Robert Weisenburger Richard Sonterre	
District 2:	Richard Moses Bob Benke (Chair)	
District 3:	Bryan K. Olson Randy Gustafson	
District 4:		Christopher Leifeld
	Peter Hendricks	
District 5:	Rod Halvorson Wendy Underwood	
District 6:	Michael Fratto	
		Russell Miller
District 7:	Bud Berry	
		Marvin Koppen
At Large:	A.L. Brown Beverly Aplikowski Fred Perez	

Also present: Kyle Thomas, Director, Civil Division, County Attorney's Office  
Jeff Stephenson, Assistant County Attorney  
Bonnie Jackelen, County Manager's Office  
Joseph Mansky, Elections Office  
Megan Haugen, Elections Office

Opening remarks and ground rules presented

Chair Benke opened the public hearing and called three times for public testimony. Hearing none, at 6:10 p.m. the public hearing went into recess, to be reopened if a member of the public appeared prior to 7:00 p.m.

Moses said a problem in the Charter could be fixed with this amendment.

Presentation by Elections Director Joe Mansky

The meeting was reconvened at 6:24 p.m.

Joe Mansky presented information on the elections office and his role as the Elections Director. He stated that Charter amendment questions must be placed on the general election ballot, and that

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titles must be 10 words or less. For this upcoming election, he stated that August 24<sup>th</sup> is a hard deadline for receiving a ballot question and title to be placed on the general election ballot. In order for the question to be placed on the ballot, it has to be approved by the County Attorney. Once the ballot has been approved, it goes to the printer. He prefers to get the question sooner rather than later in order to start laying out the ballot as soon as the primary is over. There is virtually no cost to putting a Charter amendment question on the general election ballot.

Fratto sought clarification on whether the Charter question was the same as the Charter change, and whether the number of words were limited for the ballot question.

Mansky stated that the question will be different than the actual Charter change, and will start with “shall the Ramsey County Charter be changed to...” and that the fewer words on the question, the better.

Hendricks asked whether Mansky was aware of an initiative that had been successful.

Mansky was not aware of any initiated ballot question or referendum that was successful during his tenure.

Hendricks asked what “the next election” meant, and if it meant the next general election.

Mansky stated that “election” means “regularly scheduled election,” which currently means the primary election. The board has the option to call a special election, and he recommends that special elections run in conjunction with regularly scheduled election.

Hendricks asked what the cost would be to conduct a special election.

Mansky stated that the cost would be \$500,000 for a county special election, and must be paid for by the County Board.

Halvorson thanked Mansky for the quick turnaround by his office during the petition drive process. He believes that the number of signatures for a petition would be around 15,000.

Mansky recommends that petition circulators get 10% more than the required number due to people signing the petition who are not eligible to do so.

Halvorson asked what the timing was to approve the signatures on the petition, and what would the latest date be for approval.

Mansky stated that there is not a set date, but on or around July 7 or 8.

Halvorson asked where it is in the Charter that states that the County Attorney has to approve the language on the ballot.

Mansky stated that it is state law in 204D.04, which says that before the ballot is printed, it has to be approved by a legal advisor.

Halvorson asked if there is anything in the Charter that the Charter Commission itself should be the advisor on what should go on the ballot.

*(Continued)*

Mansky stated that as the Charter stands today, the answer is no, and that the Charter Commission is an advisory body, and that his direction comes from the County Board, as they are the elected body, and that his legal advice comes from the County Attorney.

Halvorson asked for advice for a group that is holding a petition drive, and having the Charter Commission place it on the ballot with their authority.

Mansky stated that the citizens of Ramsey County can petition the Charter Commission to do something, and it doesn't have to be a formal document. This happened two years ago, when two questions came from the Charter Commission.

Halvorson asked if Mansky has the authority to ask the Charter Commission to make a recommendation to help facilitate Mansky's job.

Mansky stated that he would answer questions as he was asked.

Perez asked how an automatic referendum would work.

Mansky stated there is no answer to that question at the moment, and he would have to defer to the County Attorney.

#### Public Testimony

The public hearing was reconvened as one citizen appeared.

Robert Zick, Maplewood

Benke moved, seconded by Brown, to adjourn the public testimony part of the meeting at 6:58 p.m. Approved unanimously on a voice vote.