

CURRENT TRENDS IN CITY CHARTERS

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2022 TCAA Summer Conference

GREAT RESOURCES

- ▶ Texas Home Rule Charter, TML Update to Blodgett (2010)
- ▶ The Charter Review Process, Ronald D. Stutes (2016)
- ▶ How to Amend Your Home-Rule Charter, Ryan Henry (2021)
- ▶ An Analysis of Texas' Municipal Home Rule Charters Since 1994, John V. McDonald (2000)
- ▶ An Analysis of Texas Home Rule Charter, Charles E. Zech (2008)

FOUNDATIONAL TRENDS

- ▶ More cities having charter amendment elections
 - ▶ Many charters have not been amended in over 30 years
 - ▶ Most charters have inconsistent, contradictory and vague provisions
 - ▶ Cities regularly have charter provisions they just ignore
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TRENDS

- ▶ Leaving Articles, Sections, sentences, and words on the cutting room floor
 - ▶ Unnecessary Language
 - ▶ Duplicative Language – not the same as Unnecessary Language
 - ▶ Charter
 - ▶ State law
- ▶ Effect on Propositions and Subject Matter

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY

- ▶ Committee or no Committee
 - ▶ Media
 - ▶ Social media
 - ▶ Civic Groups
 - ▶ Other Local Governments
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WHERE TO START?

- ▶ Start with an information item on an agenda at a regular meeting
 - ▶ Do not surprise your council members
 - ▶ Use it to educate media and public
 - ▶ Seek to simplify, not impress

TRENDS

- ▶ Disaster Clauses
 - ▶ Reformulating your Government

DO WE NEED A COMMITTEE?

- ▶ Use of a committee is most common
 - ▶ Legitimizes the process
 - ▶ Advocacy benefits
 - ▶ Lessens possibility of charge of “politics”
 - ▶ Committee Charge

WHO GOES ON THE COMMITTEE?

- ▶ Appointments
 - ▶ Committee size
 - ▶ Individual appointments
 - ▶ Consensus appointments

- ▶ Focus on diversity:
 - ▶ Race
 - ▶ Gender
 - ▶ Geography
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Involvement


TRENDS

- ▶ Fewer “political” appointments
- ▶ Fewer elected positions
- ▶ More individuals trusted in the community
- ▶ Diversity across age, race, gender

WHAT DOES THE COMMITTEE DO?

- ▶ Meets with city staff and attorney(s)
- ▶ Studies possible amendments, proposed and otherwise
- ▶ Make recommendations to city council
- ▶ Help educate citizens on proposed amendments

GETTING STARTED

- ▶ Committee members should be called with invitation to participate
 - ▶ Initial letter outlining charge (if any), duties, timeline through election day and general explanation of duties
 - ▶ Provide copy of current city charter
 - ▶ Provide resources
 - ▶ Post meetings as public meeting and invite media
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TRENDS

- ▶ Push for smaller government
- ▶ Voter distrust of government
- ▶ Vocal group(s) of unhappy citizens

THE FIRST MEETING

- ▶ High level view of local government
- ▶ Give history of city charter and amendments
- ▶ Elect Chair and Vice Chair
- ▶ Set meeting parameters
 - ▶ Vote necessary to recommend amendments
 - ▶ Reconsideration of previously approved amendments
 - ▶ Length of meetings
 - ▶ Citizen Participation
- ▶ Set process for review
- ▶ Set regular meeting schedule

WHAT IS THE CITY COUNCIL DOING?

- ▶ Consider recommending they not attend committee meetings
 - ▶ Provide an update in open session at each council meeting
 - ▶ Understand concerns and wants of your council
 - ▶ Make sure council is not surprised
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TRENDS

- ▶ Change in base number for initiative, referendum and recall
- ▶ Increased requirements for petition signatures

SELLING THE AMENDMENTS

- ▶ Requires work with media to get firm reporting
- ▶ Council must be supportive of election
- ▶ Council, administration and committee members must be out selling
- ▶ Must be prepared on talking points
- ▶ HOA's, civic organizations, church groups other locally influential groups
- ▶ Public Hearings

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