



City of Cambridge

CALENDAR ITEM # 1
22.

IN CITY COUNCIL

October 19, 1992
October 26, 1992

COUNCILLOR RUSSELL

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to obtain an opinion from the City Solicitor regarding the attached letter and notice which was sent out under the auspices of the City Council to determine whether what appears to be an initiative sponsored by a Political Action Committee should be sponsored by the City, using City property for its meeting, and city funding for its mailing, and report back to the City Council at the next scheduled meeting.

NO ACTION TAKEN.

**PLACED ON FILE UNDER RULE NINETEEN OF THE CITY
COUNCIL RULES.**



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CHARTER RIGHT EXERCISED BY COUNCILLOR WALSH



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

CITY HALL, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

(617) 349-4280

Fax (617) 349-4287

October 8, 1992

Dear Friends:

Does Cambridge need to reform it's municipal Charter?

For the past several years the question has been raised by a large number of citizens groups, individuals, and public officials. On Wednesday, October 14, 1992 at 7:30 p.m., we will be sponsoring a public meeting at City Hall to explore it.

The current Plan E Charter has stood for nearly fifty years without significant change. It has been called the "strong manager - weak council" form of governance. Does it cause rule by the bureaucracy as some have claimed or insulate us from ward politics as others argue? Some question the near absolute authority the charter gives to an appointed official - while the charter's proponents praise it's ability to keep politics out of municipal administration.

Should Cambridge have a strong mayor? or maybe just a stronger mayor? Should we continue to use proportional representation? Should the City Council be involved in the appointments to boards and commissions, or even significant staff positions? We feel that these are questions that are at least worth asking.

What do you think?

We will start with a review of the current Charter and the process for charter reform. In addition, we will accept testimony from citizens. Join the discussion.

Sincerely,

Ed Cyr (enc)
Ed Cyr
Vice Mayor

Alice K. Wolf
Alice K. Wolf
City Councillor

s

enclosure

P.S. We expect to hold a second meeting on the Charter on Tuesday, October 20, 1992 at 7:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Should the city manager hold all the cards?

"We have the most powerful manager, perhaps in the US and certainly in the Commonwealth," according to Vice Mayor Ed Cyr.

This power vested in the Cambridge city manager, "particularly as it involves boards and commissions," is one of the main reasons Cyr wants to create a charter commission to review the city's Plan E form of government.

"The council has ... a nuclear weapon in dealing with the city manager," according to Cyr. In other words, councilors can either accept City Manager Robert Healy's decisions, or they can fire him, but the charter strips them of more subtle influences over policies they enact.

Some observers see the push for charter review as part of a move against Healy, whose current contract expires next June. But Cyr maintains that Healy is not the issue.

The council this month rejected Cyr's request for a commission to look at charter reform. This 50-year-old system of municipal government, set up under state law, mandates election of councilors through proportional representation, in which each citizen votes for nine councilors at large and varying weight is given to the votes.

It also defines the weak mayor and strong city manager form of government in which city councilors can do little more than hire and fire the manager, while the manager appoints virtually all commission and board members, other than those set up by the mayor or council.

In fact, the charter says, "neither the city council nor any of its committees or members shall direct or request the appointment of any person to, or his removal from, office by the city manager..."

Although the council voted 4-4 against forming a charter commission, with Frank Duehay voting present, Cyr and Councilor Alice Wolf have scheduled public hearings for 7:30 pm Oct. 14 and 20 so citizens can give their own opinions of the city's form of government.

"It is a mistake not to have the conversation," said

Cyr. "Too many people were discussing it in the last electoral cycle, there is too much ferment around the issue not to have an open discussion."

Except for Duehay, the Cambridge Civic Association councilors favored Cyr's order for a charter commission while independents rejected it.

Concern among councilors over their influence on boards and commissions came to a head in early 1991 after the city council approved a controversial limit on commercial parking and created an Interim Parking Control Committee to enforce this policy. City Manager Healy, however, appointed a majority of members who CCA councilors said were not sympathetic to the basic policy the committee was to enforce.

Councilors who favored the parking freeze were enraged. They saw the appointments as a reflection of how powerless they were in getting their policies implemented if the city manager didn't back them, even though voters were sure to hold them responsible.

Councilor Bill Walsh, an independent, said the call for a charter review indicates CCA councilors may not want to renew Healy's contract in June. And as Healy's contract comes up for renewal, various groups of citizens are planning tributes to the manager, who has been with the city 10 years. On Nov. 5, former Mayor Barbara Ackermann and Judge Lawrence Feloney are co-chairs of a \$50-a-plate tribute at the Cambridge Center Marriott, with proceeds going to homeless agencies.

CCA member Cyr said CCA councilors have supported Healy's policy initiatives at least as much as the Independent councilors have. The possible need for a different form of government is not directed at Healy himself, but at a system that leaves the council too weak to be effective.

"You have to look at how the authority is distributed. Healy is not the issue," Cyr said. "The charter existed before Bob Healy and the charter that is left will exist well after each of us."

—AMY MILLER



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NON-CONSENT ORDER #22

F-476

Councillor Russell re: Legal opinion
on the use of city property, mailing
on an initiative sponsored by a Political
Action Committee.

In City Council,

October 19, 1992

Charter Right exercised
by Councillor Walsh.
10/26/92 No Action
Taken - Placed on
file under Rule 19
of the City Council Rules.