



MEMORANDUM

Cindy Portmann
County Assessor

Linda Hjelle
Chief Deputy

M/S #510
3000 Rockefeller Ave.
Everett, WA 98201-4046

(425) 388-3433
FAX (425) 388-3961

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To: Snohomish County Charter Review Commission

From: Cindy Portmann, Snohomish County Assessor *CP*

Re: Issues Being Considered by the Charter Review Commission

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you regarding the Charter review process. I commend all of you for getting involved and serving the citizens of our community. Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated.

My opinions and suggestions on issues are not only based on my 19 years of experience in Snohomish County government and as the current assessor, but are heavily influenced by the feedback I have received from my constituents. They include:

Biennial Budgeting – I would support changing the Charter to allow for biennial budgeting and believe that it would allow employees, department heads and elected officials more time to be responsive to our citizens. It would also allow for additional time for planning and implementing programs that increase service delivery and efficiencies. Obviously, a change to a biennial budget would require that funds be set aside for unforeseen legislative mandates that require additional funds to implement.

Line Item Veto – I would support a change to the Charter that would allow for line item vetoes in the budget with a supermajority vote of the Council.

Size of the County Council – I support submitting a proposed amendment to the voters to increase the size of the County Council to seven members when the population of Snohomish County reaches 700,000 people. This would allow the county time to plan for the redistricting process and plan for the budgetary impacts of adding two new Council members and their support staff. I believe the citizens are well served by the current Council, but recognize their workload cannot continue to increase while our population increases without loss of accessibility to the Council and accountability to the citizens.

Appointed vs. Elected Position – As you know, all 39 counties in Washington State elect their assessor. The assessor should continue to be an independently elected county official who is accountable directly to the voters. The responsibilities and duties of the assessor are mandated by state law and the focus of this position should continue to be the administration of a fair, impartial and equitable property tax assessment system.

The feedback I have received from the community is that voters continue to want a voice in choosing all of their currently elected county officials vs. appointing these positions.

Term Limits - I encourage the Commission to propose an amendment to the Charter that would give the voters the option of returning experienced, accountable and proven leaders to office. I believe it would be appropriate to give the voters a chance to voice their opinion on this issue.

Partisan vs. Non-Partisan - In 1996 the voters approved a change to the Charter which made the Assessor, Auditor, Clerk and Treasurer non-partisan positions. I believe the voters recognized that these positions were administrative in nature and that their mandated duties and responsibilities were not tied to a particular party platform.

Salary Commission for Elected Officials – I encourage the Commission to propose an amendment to the Charter that would give the voters the option of creating a Salary Review Commission. This Salary Commission could be modeled after the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials that meets every two years. I'd like to share the following information from their website at <http://www.salaries.wa.gov/>

The Commission was created by House Joint Resolution 49, an amendment to the state Constitution that authorized creation of an independent, citizen commission to set the salaries of the state's elected officials. That constitutional amendment was passed by the voters on November 4, 1986. The purpose for creating the Commission was to establish proper salaries for the state's elected officials and to remove political considerations from the process.

The Commission is responsible for setting the salaries of the elected officials in the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative Branches of state government. In total, the Commission sets the salaries of 475 elected state officials; the majority are positions in the Judiciary. Neither the Governor, the Legislature, nor the Commission itself has the authority to change or amend the salary schedule after it has been legally adopted, filed with the Secretary of State within the prescribed period of time, and the 90 day referendum period has elapsed.

Performance Auditor – Moving the Performance Auditor function to be under the direction of the Legislative Branch and County Council is a proposal that should be considered. There appears to be a conflict in our current Charter that clearly gives the County Council authority to conduct audits under Article 2, Section 2.90. This appears to be in conflict with the provision adopted in 1996 for the Performance Auditor function which is now in Article 3, Section 3.130 as pointed out previously by our County Auditor.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present these proposals to you. Please feel free to contact me at 425-388-3678 if you have questions or I can be of further assistance.