

Proposed Clark County Home Rule Charter

May 2014

Introduction

The 2014 proposed home rule charter is the work of the 15-member Board of Freeholders. In November 2013, voters elected five county residents from each of the three Clark County Commissioner districts to serve as the Board of Freeholders. Its only purpose was to draft a home rule charter to put before voters. Members met from November 2013 through May 2014, disbanding when the charter was completed.

Allowed by state law, a home rule charter gives local voters the opportunity to make the structure of county government fit the community's needs.

The Board of Freeholders represented a wide array of positions on various topics, but members' common goal was to create a better, more effective government for Clark County. Despite varying ideas about how to achieve that goal, members were nearly unanimous about what issues should be addressed in the charter. Still, the document is one of compromise; no freeholder got all he or she wanted in the final product.

This proposed charter contains checks and balances freeholders think will help maximize good governance. Still, a document cannot prevent bad governance. Voters must remain vigilant about electing people who will make wise, fair and far-sighted decisions for the good of the entire county, freeholders said.

Below is a summary of the proposed charter in a question and answer form. For the full text of the charter, please go to www.clark.wa.gov/freeholders/index.html.

Frequently asked questions about the proposed Clark County Home Rule Charter

What in the charter is different from present form of county government?

The charter proposes five areas of change. They are:

- Creating a County Council/County Manager form of government. The charter clearly delineates roles and responsibilities of the elected County Council and appointed County Manager. The County Council will deal with budget, legislative and policy issues and the County Manager will focus on implementation of those policies and administrative duties.
- Broadening the base of elected representation with five County Council members instead of three County Commissioners.
- Electing four County Council members by district in both the primary and general election and one council member at large to serve as chair.
- Increasing the voice of voters through Initiative and Referendum powers. Each will be limited as required by state law.
- Providing periodic review and potential amendment of the charter, which will allow the document to meet the county's future needs. The first review will be five years after the charter is approved, and then at least every 10 years thereafter. Members of future Charter Review Commissions will be elected. All charter amendments must be approved by a vote of the people.

Will the charter affect other aspects of county governance?

No. The roles and responsibilities of the Assessor, Auditor, Clerk, Prosecuting Attorney, Sheriff and Treasure and all county departments will remain unchanged.

Why did the Board of Freeholders decide to expand to a council of five members?

Five council members strengthens citizen representation, and allows the council's workload to be shared more broadly. A larger council could open opportunities for more Clark County residents to serve as citizen legislators, with or without additional employment.

Why did the Freeholders agree on electing four council members by district and one at large?

The Board of Freeholders agreed this model would preserve close ties between voters and their elected representative while ensuring the chair will take a communitywide, long-term view for the benefit of the entire county.

Will the charter cost taxpayers more than the current form of county government?

The charter was designed to keep the five-member County Council's operational costs comparable to those of the current three-member Board of County Commissioners. By 2017, after a transition period, all five council members will be paid the same salary, which will be essentially half of what commissioners are now paid.

Why did Freeholders select a council-manager form of government?

Freeholders decided an appointed county manager and elected County Council would minimize potential conflicts between the positions, provide more consistent administration, ensure the necessary skills and qualifications in a manager, and be cost effective. Freeholders also agreed that despite their clearly defined roles, the County Council and county manager should work toward a common vision.

What are initiative and referendum powers?

An initiative is a procedure by which county residents can, with a petition, propose a new law and submit it to voters. A referendum is a procedure by which county residents can, with a petition, repeal some actions by a vote of the people. Both initiative and referendum powers are limited. Freeholders established thresholds for signature gathering and validation that will discourage frivolous petitions but allow practical use of these powers.

Will voters cast ballots on all or parts of the charter?

Voters will cast ballots on the charter as a whole.

What percent of voted ballots will be required to approve or reject the charter?

The proposed charter will pass or fail with a simple majority.

Will new layers of government be required?

No new commissions or committees are mandated by the charter except for the Charter Review Commission.

How were the new council districts created?

State law tells counties how to define election districts using apolitical criteria. This process was followed to create four new council districts. Freeholders did not change the districts defined using the state process.

Proposed Council Districts 2014

KEY
 Proposed Council Districts
 City limits

