

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

Date Issued: October 18, 2007

IBA Report Number: 07-102

Rules Committee Agenda Date: October 24, 2007

Item Number: 1

Subject: Charter Review Committee Recommendations

OVERVIEW

As detailed in the Final Report of the 2007 San Diego Charter Review Committee, the group was created by the Mayor and charged with specific tasks related to Charter review approximately six months ago. One or more representatives of the Office of the IBA attended each meeting of the Charter Review Committee and its subcommittees in order to provide research and information, give input on behalf of our office, and observe the process and dialogue in order to inform the comments we would make to the City Council.

In this report, we will only discuss items recommended in the Charter Review Committee's Final Report for which the IBA has taken a position and/or wishes to make additional information available. The following are the Committee's recommendation areas which will be discussed in this report:

- Sunset Revision
- Eleven-Member City Council
- Veto Override
- Independent Budget Analyst
- Chief Financial Officer
- Audit Committee and City Auditor
- Balanced Budget

In addition, the IBA will make another suggestion, on the matter of Mayoral appointment of a City Manager/Chief Operating Officer, in this report.

FISCAL/POLICY DISCUSSION

Sunset Revision

The Charter Review Committee has recommended that the trial period for the Strong Mayor form of government be extended by four years and that it shall be made permanent unless other action is taken. The IBA wishes to point out that, although the committee has characterized this as an extended trial period, it is actually being made permanent through this proposal. Generally in a trial, a decision on the question is required at the end of the trial period. This provision does not require the question to be called at the end of the trial, which effectively means it is permanent if passed by the voters next year. The recommendation does allow that the voters may act to alter or terminate this at any time, however this is a right of the citizens regardless of the permanent or temporary nature of any provision in the Charter.

The IBA suggests it would be more candid to let the public know that this is effectively making the Strong Mayor form permanent, if this recommendation is approved. Alternately, if a trial period is still desired, a provision for automatic placement on a prior ballot should be included. The ballot should be provided for sufficiently in advance to ensure that the result may be certified by the Secretary of State prior to the actual expiration of the trial period.

Eleven-Member City Council

The IBA takes no position on the recommendation to expand the City Council. However, as readers will note, the recommendation is not specific as to when the expansion should take place. During discussion, some members of the subcommittee and committee expressed concerns about the cost of redistricting in the near future (among other concerns) when the decennial redistricting as required by the Charter would follow soon after. However, some members supported an immediate redistricting process notwithstanding the added cost and effort. Therefore, the committee ultimately decided to let the City Council choose the most appropriate time to perform the redistricting necessary for expansion.

The IBA has recently attempted to quantify the actual cost of a redistricting effort. Based on the 2002 Annual Budget, the City budgeted almost \$162,000 for the 2000 Redistricting Commission (RC), which comprised two part-time staff at approximately \$72,000 and non-personnel expense. In addition, the IBA is aware that the RC utilized the services of a Senior Planner and that the City Clerk provided Recorders to take minutes. These costs are not captured in the allocation above and there may be further staff or material support that the IBA has been unable to identify. The IBA believes this information can be valuable in considering the timeframe for redistricting to expand the Council, should this recommendation be forwarded. However, we would note that these are budgeted, not actual costs. The IBA was unable to find records for the actual costs associated with the 2000 RC.

In addition, the 2000 RC made a recommendation for future RC's budget requirements in their final report in 2001. The 2000 RC suggested the budget should include funding for three full-time staff, consultants, legal counsel, and various supplies and equipment. This closely mirrors a proposal made by the 2000 RC in December 2000 (Attachment I). The 12 month budget proposed \$750,000 for five staff, consultants and related costs. The IBA estimates that a proposal for just three staff could be reduced significantly. However, considering the increase in cost for salaries and materials since 2000, we suggest that the cost of supporting an RC effort, as envisioned by the 2000 RC, could still be between \$650,000 - \$700,000.

The operating costs for the additional districts may be as much as \$3 million annually, if current district budgets are retained. As discussed by the committee, the cost of this proposal is a trade-off for the additional representation citizens would enjoy.

Veto Override

During the discussion of increasing the threshold for overriding the Mayor's veto, the committee considered linking the issue to the expansion of the City Council. This proposal ultimately failed to garner a majority of votes amongst the subcommittee or committee. However, the IBA believes that further discussion of this issue may be warranted, both due to the split vote at the committee and due to the unique situation it would create for veto override. As described in the report, implementing the two-thirds veto override for an eight-member City Council would in reality require a three-quarters override. While two-thirds results in percentages greater than 66.7% in some cities, as the report references, a 75% requirement would be a uniquely high hurdle for regular resolutions and ordinances. Furthermore, for special ordinances that currently require six votes to pass, the override could only be accomplished with seven of eight votes or 85.7%.

The IBA suggests that, if the override and 11 member Council recommendations are approved, the Council may wish to consider hastening the expansion of the Council and linking it to the new override implementation. The expansion of the Council may be accomplished through the redistricting process, as described. Alternately the appointment of a temporary at-large member may be considered until a full redistricting can be completed and new Council Member(s) elected.

Independent Budget Analyst

The IBA supports the language recommended by the Charter Review Committee with respect to this office. The substantive addition recommended clarifies within the Charter that the work of the IBA may include both budgetary and policy analysis, as currently provided by the Municipal Code. We believe that this language clarifies the nature of the independent work performed by the IBA while maintaining the City Council's authority to set powers and duties of the office in the Municipal Code.

The committee also gave some consideration to changing the name of the IBA to incorporate the legislative analysis role of the office, and making the office permanent regardless of the form of government the City may have. Ultimately, the committee has placed it in the category for further study. The IBA would support the permanence of this office if studied in the future, or if taken under consideration for this ballot, recognizing its value in either form of government.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

The IBA supports the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to place the CFO in the Charter and to assign all comptroller duties to this position as part of the proposed split of the Auditor and Comptroller's office and the appropriate assignment of audit duties to the City Auditor (see discussion below). Note that under this amendment, the CFO shall be appointed by the City Manager (Mayor) and confirmed by the City Council, which is not the case at this time. With this amendment, the City Treasurer, a subordinate of the CFO, will no longer require confirmation by the City Council, which the IBA finds reasonable.

Audit Committee and City Auditor

As the IBA has recommended since our first report on the topic (IBA Report 06-35 dated 8/30/06) we believe the Audit Committee and City Auditor should be considered together, as they comprise the entire Audit Organization of the City. This will ensure that the most independent and effective infrastructure is in place to fulfill this purpose, one of the most important oversight functions in City government.

The recommendation by the committee is to establish a five member Audit Committee, two members of which are City Council Members (one of whom shall serve as chair) and three members are citizens with financial expertise, appointed by the Council. The committee has included a screening process that closely mirrors that proposed by the IBA in our original Report 06-35, for the appointment of these citizen members. The screening committee shall be comprised of one member of the City Council, the CFO, City Attorney, the IBA and two outside financial experts, who will then provide a pool of qualified candidates for Council consideration.

The City Auditor is appointed by the Mayor, in consultation with the Audit Committee, confirmed by the City Council and reports to the Audit Committee. The City Auditor shall be appointed for a 10 year term and may be terminated by the Audit Committee with a right to appeal to the City Council.

The recommendations forwarded by the committee mirror those by the IBA in our original report 15 months ago, except that the Audit Committee has been expanded from three to five members. The IBA continues to support this model for the Audit Organization for the City of San Diego.

Balanced Budget

The IBA supports the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee to clarify and strengthen a balanced budget requirement in the City Charter. The IBA worked with the subcommittee and the CFO to propose and scrutinize potential language for consideration. The language ultimately approved by the committee, which was proposed by the IBA and CFO, recognizes the roles of both the executive and legislative branches in the budget process and ensures that a balanced budget is adopted and maintained throughout the fiscal year.

City Manager/Chief Operating Officer

At the meeting of October 15, 2007, the City Council confirmed the Mayor’s appointment of Jay Goldstone as Chief Operating Officer for the City of San Diego. During the discussion, a point of possible conflict in the City Charter was raised. While Article XV confers all the duties of the City Manager on the Mayor, it later allows the Mayor to appoint, direct and dismiss the City Manager (Section 265(b)(7) – (9)). Because this creates confusion, and because the current Mayor does not use the term City Manager, we suggest that the Council may wish to replace the words “City Manager” in the aforementioned sections with “Chief Operating Officer” or a similar term.

CONCLUSION

In this report, the IBA has noted support for recommendations of the Charter Review Committee including language for the IBA, CFO, Audit Committee and City Auditor, and the balanced budget requirement. While the IBA takes no position on the recommendation to expand the City Council, we have attempted to provide some historical information about the cost of the last redistricting effort and suggestions for expanding the Council in light of the increased veto override proposal. Finally, the IBA has made two recommendations for modifications:

1. If approving the committee’s sunset revision proposal, include language that acknowledges that the Strong Mayor form of government is being made permanent. If there is a desire to keep a true trial period, provide for automatic placement on the ballot prior to the expiration of the period.
2. Consider amending the Section 265(b)(7)-(9) references to a City Manager by the Mayor to appointment of a Chief Operating Officer to reduce confusion with previous articles.

[signed]

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Deputy Director

[signed]

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