

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 15, 2015  
TO: Honorable City Councilmembers on the Charter Review Committee  
FROM: Norma Damashek  
SUBJECT: Recommendations for your consideration re. Charter changes

My involvement with San Diego City charter changes spans the past fifteen years, both as an interested citizen and as past president of the city's League of Women Voters. During that time our Charter underwent important changes and by now could use a careful clean-up. I'm pleased that this committee is initiating the job and I would like to offer the following observations:

**Charter clean-up and charter amendments** are separate processes and require different approaches, even though both eventually require voter approval.

In terms of clean-up – we should have confidence in the abilities of the city attorney's office to identify Charter inconsistencies, to recommend clean-up provisions, to seamlessly incorporate “strong mayor” changes, and to bring your attention to other problematic issues.

In terms of Charter amendments to create policy changes – this process must involve active public participation and, depending on the scope of change, Charter Review Committee meetings may not suffice. A Citizens Charter Commission (appointed or elected) may be necessary.

But for right now I've got two easy suggestions that would greatly serve the public interest:

**First, this would be a good opportunity to make active use of City TV** to air a short series of talks to educate the public on how local government works. It could be an invaluable, entertaining, and informative civics lesson for all of us and would be easy and fun to put together.

**Second, this would be a great opportunity to add a succinct preamble to our city charter.** This preamble would remind our elected leaders as well as the public about the purpose and intent of city government and the city charter.

Here's a familiar example of a succinct preamble:

*We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves*

*and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

Here's how San Francisco handles it:

*In order to obtain the full benefit of home rule granted by the Constitution of the State of California; to improve the quality of urban life; to encourage the participation of all persons and all sectors in the affairs of the City and County; to enable municipal government to meet the needs of the people effectively and efficiently; to provide for accountability and ethics in public service; to foster social harmony and cohesion; and to assure equality of opportunity for every resident: We, the people of the City and County of San Francisco, ordain and establish this Charter as the fundamental law of the City and County.*

Here's how it's written in Riverside, CA:

*We, the people of the City of Riverside believe in promoting an inclusive community with shared economic, environmental and cultural prosperity, equal civil and political rights, social harmony and cohesion, and opportunities for all governed by responsible and responsive public officials who promote citizen participation, as well as just and equitable tax and financial policies; and these beliefs are rooted in our desire to enhance the uniqueness of the City of Riverside.*

Even Honolulu does it:

*We, the people of the City and County of Honolulu, accepting responsibility to seek to achieve in our time that righteousness by which the life of our land is preserved and to encourage and enable our people to participate in their governance, so hereby adopt this Charter of the City and County of Honolulu.*

I hope you see the benefits of creating an introductory preamble to the San Diego City Charter.

Respectfully,

Norma Damashek  
[ndamashek@ucsd.edu](mailto:ndamashek@ucsd.edu)  
858-459-8751