

July 6, 2016

Dear Chair Leonard and Members of the Charter Review Committee, first I would like to thank you for your service to the voters of Multnomah County. Your dedication and commitment to the use of your discretionary time, to take on the work that in many ways operates away from the limelight is indeed laudable.

I would also like to thank you for the invitation to speak at the last Charter Review Committee. As you proceed through your work, I believe having sitting Commissioners visit to listen and speak to CRC members is an important part of the process, which I hope is able to answer any questions that members might have.

While I support the work that the Committee is engaged in, I must respectfully disagree with a position that the Committee has taken regarding the use of a County Manager to in effect, manage the work of Multnomah County.

Currently we operate in a manner that affords the Board to have, in effect a County Manager, that being the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners. That position has the authority to manage the administrative and executive functions of the Board, is charged with development of the County budget and is balanced by four other voices on the Board. There is no executive fiat. The Chair proposes, but the Board amends/ adopts through public deliberation and engagement. The Board of County Commissioners is in fact the represented voice of the community. We answer to the people, we invite the community at large to participate in our budget hearings in every district in the county. By involving the public we ensure their voices are heard throughout the myriad set of processes we engage in.

I wholeheartedly support the current system we have at Multnomah County. Four Commissioners and a chair, elected by district and through a countywide vote, have the responsibility of executing and adopting Multnomah County's 1.8 billion dollar budget. The public has an expectation that this budget seeks to incorporate meeting the needs of our most vulnerable community members, our elders, children, those suffering from mental health and physical health problems, and those who need to be confined due to their risk to public safety. We create a safety net, that ensures our bridges are safe to travel, that abandoned pets are not left to suffer and risk injury to themselves and others, and to house the houseless, and homeless populations. We also secure access to services that promote neighborhood livability in an area that incorporates urban and rural settings. In short, we operate in a form of government that works on behalf of the community at large.

I understand that some on the committee would seek to bring forth a professional County Manager. Someone that focuses simply on the executive function of County Government. In this structure, the County manager would be freed from having to deal with public policy deliberation or accountability. I am reminded of the old adage, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". I do not believe that our current structure is broken, nor does it provide value to tinker with it simply because of the current political climate that operates on the theory of "throwing the bums out" philosophy.

Our current structure requires that the elected County Commissioners and Chair have the responsibility to collectively and collaboratively engage in administrative and budget tasks that support the voice of the electorate. To take those responsibilities from the Chair, would in effect, destroy and diminish the Chair's oversight of current county operations. While we may disagree, on specific strategies, the values of the board are the same as the people we represent. Our operations are functioning at a high level with clear direction from the Chair's office. If this measure is approved it has the potential of making our operations become dysfunctional and eliminating the voices from the entire community in our administrative and executive budget process.

I am in support of campaign finance reform, I believe it is needed, unfortunately the ballot measure does not cover the entire state and will cause candidates to make more calls to raise the dollars needed to run a campaign. If we could legislate the costs associated with sending direct mail pieces, commercials, and folks who manage campaigns that would make running for office obtainable, and affordable. Short of addressing this issue from a statewide or national lense this ballot measure will create an unintended consequence when women and underserved minorities run for elected office. Multnomah County has historically put more women in elected office than any of our counterparts at the City of Portland.. Since 1975 Multnomah County has elected 23 women into office compared to the City of Portland who have only elected 6 women Commissioners since 1943. This ballot measure will likely cause a disparity for women and communities of color from successfully competing for elected office for the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners.

I support an elected Sheriff position because I trust the electorate to make a good choice.

Again, Chair Leonard I want to thank you for the many hours of service that you and the committee have given to Multnomah County residents to review our county charter. The commitment and dedication the Charter Review Committee has shown through this long process should be applauded.

Sincerely,

Loretta Smith
Multnomah County Commissioner District 2