

Memorandum

To: Multnomah County Charter Review Committee

Date: July 18, 2016

From: Steve March, PhD, Multnomah County Auditor

Re: COUNTY MANAGER Proposed Charter Amendment – Deep Concerns

I previously testified to the Charter Review Committee that I felt the existing system, with a Chief Operating Officer (COO) answering to the Chair was working well and at that time no one appeared to disagree with that statement. I went on to express concern that under a County Administrator model, essentially what is being proposed here under the name of County Manager, too much power was vested in one individual who may or may not reflect the interests of the public, as the Chair currently does. You further heard testimony from a Washington County Commissioner who echoed this sentiment. I would urge you NOT to proceed down this path; here are some reasons:

1 – This is a fundamental change to Multnomah County government, yet no case has been made that the current system is broken. I would point to the Auditor's Office ability to effect change by working with the County Chair as well as the COO. The current structure has been called a hybrid, but it is a successful one. In terms of audit recommendations, we enjoy over a 90% implementation rate – the system is not broken. I will also add that my counterpart in a county with this model does not enjoy the same access and response that our office does with an elected chair.

2 - A County Manager does not answer to the citizens of the County as the Chair does. A County Manager is not subject to recall should the citizens disagree with the direction that the County is being taken nor can they vote for a change in direction or leadership as they can now.

3 – There are unforeseen and unaddressed issues in this proposal. For example, the County Charter requires, "The chair of the board of county commissioners or the responsible elected official shall respond in writing to all internal audit reports stating what actions have been or will be taken to address the findings contained in the audit." [8.10 (4)] I don't see that this has been addressed and there may be other unaddressed issues as well.

If it isn't broken, it really shouldn't be "fixed" with a change so fundamental and that weakens the electorate's ability to vote and recall the leadership of their choice. There are certainly other local governments that need fundamental change, but Multnomah County doesn't need this.