

Charter Commission hearing, 6 PM Friday, October 9, 2009
Ben Franklin building, Hilo
Comments by Ms. Cory (Martha) Harden, PO Box 10265, Hilo, Occupied Hawaii 96721
808-968-8965 mh@interpac.net

Thank you for considering citizen comments on Charter amendments.

I support most of the amendments proposed by Debbie Hecht of Kona, Councilmember Brenda Ford, and Margaret Wille of Kohala, as stated in my written testimony. For now I'll just comment on a few.

Legislative auditors have to bite the hand that feeds them, since County Council holds the purse strings for their office. This year the Council tried to severely cut the legislative auditor's funding. The proposed amendment would follow what many states and counties do--set aside a percentage of their operations and special funds budgets. This frees up auditors to investigate fraud, abuse, mismanagement, lack of internal controls, etc.

For redistricting, I hope the many changes proposed will make it fairer. I remember a lawsuit on the last redistricting. Many people felt it was unfair, and one citizen was so upset that I believe he took out a second mortgage to finance the lawsuit--then lost. But if voting districts aren't set fairly, you don't get a fair vote.

I support having standing Council committees, with all nine members on each committee, proposals never delayed for more than one meeting, and adequate public notice. This would restrict power plays--like the one that just re-did, un-did, and re-did committees to concentrate power in the hands of a few Council members.

I suggest adding that each Councilmember get one position as a committee chair, and one as a committee vice-chair.

I support 4-year Council terms so Councilmembers have time to learn the complexities of government, but only if there are strong recall and impeachment options.

I support writing the 2% for the land fund into the Charter. A few months ago scores of people testified to keep putting money into this fund, but the Council and Mayor chose otherwise. This prevents us from attracting matching funds and protecting irreplaceable resources like watersheds.

I support having development approvals reviewed by Community Development Plan action committees.

I support clarifying procedures for amending the Charter.

Thank you for your work on the Charter.

ALOHA COMMISSION CHAIRMAN Edmund Haituka and COMMISSION MEMBERS David Fuertes, Daphne Honma, Casey Jarman, Guy Kaulukukui, Jamae Kawauchi, Joseph Kealoha, Alapaki Nahale, Susie Osborne, Todd Shumway and Scott Unger

Thank you for considering citizen comments on Charter amendments.

I support these amendments proposed by Debbie Hecht of Kona.

4-YEAR COUNCIL TERMS, but only if we have strong recall and impeachment provisions.

RECALL AND IMPEACHMENT provisions that give adequate citizen recourse.

2% FOR THE LAND FUND- other counties have this funding set aside as part of their charter so citizens can count on funds being available to acquire access to beaches and mountains, preserve culturally important land areas and sites, beaches, coastal area, agricultural lands, protect natural resources, significant habitat or eco-systems, water quality and water systems, including buffer zones. This would remove this funding from yearly budget wrangling and have the funds available to attract matching funds. [Communication #45]

VACANCIES- I support this amendment, because voters should have some say in this process. if an elected official dies, resigns, is recalled or impeached, the 2nd highest vote getter in the last election could serve OR the public should be able to have a "say " who shall serve for the rest of the term by a special election by mail. [Communication #46]

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS- I support this amendment because it gives the council members the right to nominate people for boards and commissions, the Mayor can give comments and the public has a time to weigh in. Council members know who is qualified and involved in their districts better than the Mayor. [Communication #47]

AMENDING THE CHARTER-use the same process and procedure as Initiative and Referendum to amend the charter as written by the League of Women Voters and approved by voters in 2008. [Communication #51]

I support these amendments proposed by Councilmember Brenda Ford.

FUNDING FOR THE LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR'S OFFICE-provide the legislative auditor's office with funding independent of the budget process, so they are not beholden to the council and they can do their work independently. [Communication #40]

COUNCIL COMMITTEES- have set standing committees for the County council. Notices should be sent 6 calendar days before committee and council meetings and that council matters can only be delayed by one meeting and that each council member shall have one vote on each committee. [Communication #44]

I suggest adding that each Councilmember get one position as a committee chair, and one as a committee vice-chair.

REDISTRICTING- it is important to have each council district to have approximately the same amount of people and the island to be divided into 9 equal districts. Federal guidelines should be followed, the process clearly defined and a report made to the people in an open and transparent manner. [Communication #43]

I support these amendments proposed by Margaret Wille of Kohala.

BOARDS

Have all Board meetings be listed on the County's Calendar that is made available on the internet and provide a link to the Board's agenda.

Have all board member applications available to the public at least 30 days prior to submission to the Mayor for approval.

Have proposed board members swear an allegiance to serve the interests of the community without regard to personal self interests, business self interests, or special interests related to either of their personal or business self interests.

Require disclosure of potential conflicts of interest at board meetings in advance of the item on the Board agenda.

HAVE DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS REVIEWED BY CDP ACTION COMMITTEES

MAKEUP OF PLANNING COMMISSION AND CDP ACTION COMMITTEES

Require that these be broadly representative of community interests including environmental and socio-cultural interests.

HAVE SEPARATE ATTORNEYS FOR COUNTY COUNCIL AND MAYOR

This would prevent conflict of interest.