**CHARTER AMENDMENT FAQs**

**Dorchester Citizens for Better Government**

**What is a Charter?**

The best way to explain a charter for county government is that it is the constitution for the County, akin to the US or a state constitution, but much more simple. It establishes the governing structure and responsibilities of the governing body. The Charter may not deviate from federal and state law in its construction.

**What does the County Council do?**

The Council is the elected governing and legislative body of the County government, with the ability to set County policy and enact laws and regulations for the County.

**What are its most important duties?**

* Enacting County ordinances
* Setting policies that guide County officials under its control
* Hiring a County Manager and others to run the day-to -day affairs of the County
* Establishing an annual budget and making appropriations for each agency and department funded in whole or in part by the County government
* Setting the annual property tax and income tax rates
* Establishing and approving any changes to the County land use map

**Does the County Council Support These Proposed Amendments?**

We do not know that answer yet, and they may not have even seen them. Based on the past actions of County Council, we anticipate that at least a majority of them will not be supportive of these changes.

**How Do These Relate to the Charter Review Commission**?

The Charter Review Commission acts independently of these amendments and will make its own recommendations to the County Council. The leadership of Dorchester Citizens for Better Government will be approaching the Charter Review Commission to familiarize that body with these amendments and attempt to gain its support. We are unaware that any initial meeting of that Commission has been set.

**How Much Money Will These Cost? Will my Taxes Go Up?**

Most of the amendments’ provisions are procedural in nature and any additional costs will be minor in the context of the County’s annual budget. Taxes should not go up as a result of these amendments. Also, the County had $17 million in governmental fund balances at the end of FY 2020 that could be used to offset any new expenditures on equipment or operating expenses if needed.

**Do These Take Away the Ability of Who We Elect to Make Decisions?**

Not at all. The Council still retains its executive and legislative authority. The amendments require the Council to undertake certain actions for the improvement of the day-to-day operation of County government and public transparency as to what they are doing. The council still maintains its executive authority granted under the current Charter.

**Are these Amendments Customary Provisions Found in Other Charters or Laws?**

Yes. While provisions vary from County to County, and state to state, similar provisions are often found in charters and state and local laws. Before finalizing these amendments, the leadership of Dorchester Citizens for Better Government did extensive research on other county charters, laws, and model charters and employed a retired attorney expert in County and municipal law to draft the final versions to assure they complied with the Maryland Constitution and statutes regarding charter amendments.

**Isn’t it more Important Whom We Elect than Having Charter Amendments?**

We believe that electing quality people to office will always be the most important thing we as citizens and voters can do. But it is also important to enshrine in our governing documents “good government” provisions that our elected officials are obligated to follow to help prevent government abuses and assure transparency and citizen input in decision-making.

**Does Your Group Support or Oppose any Current Council Members?**

No.

**Is Your Group Affiliated with any one Political Party?**

No, Dorchester Citizens for Better Government is totally non-partisan.

**What if I Change my Mind Later?**

If you did not sign and now want to sign the petition, you may email Allen Nelson at Dorchartchg22@yahoo.com who can then make arrangements to have you sign the petition(s). You will be provided with the texts and summary of the questions and if you decide to sign, your only recourse to reverse your decision will be to vote against one or both of the amendments in November 2022 should they appear on the ballot.

**Will these be on the November 2022 Ballot?**

In order for these to be on the ballot, we must obtain the signatures of 20% of registered voters in the County in time to put the petitions on the ballot for the November election. The signatures must then be verified by the Board of Election Supervisors. If these tests are passed successfully, the amendments will appear on the November 2022 ballot and, when passed, will take effect soon thereafter.

**How many Valid Signatures Do You Need to Successfully Get This on the Ballot**?

As of the 2020 election, there were 22,187 registered voters in Dorchester County. We understand that our county population has gone down from the 2022 census, so this number may change. That means we would need approximately 4,438 valid signatures, based on the 2020 numbers, on each petition to place each of them on the ballot. Allowing a margin for disallowed signatures, based on what the Election Board might do with what is submitted, we believe we need at least 5,000 signatures for each petition.

**Where can I go to secure additional information or ask a question on these amendments?**

The President of the Dorchester Citizens for Better Government is Allen Nelson. You can email him at Dorchartchg22@yahoo.com , and he can either answer the question or have someone with the answer get back to you.