

Cambridge Matters  
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Ok, Dorchester voters including those in Cambridge, Hurlock, and all of the other towns in Dorchester County, you now have the opportunity, and I think the obligation, to speak out on a very important topic. You need to let your voices be heard now and in November with regard to the Dorchester County Charter Commission's recommendations for changes to the current County Charter.

You can do this now by coming to the County Council meeting on March 19, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the County Office Building or you can email, call, or speak in person to your County Council representative. What the Charter Commission was able to do is complete and improve on the efforts of the Dorchester Citizens for Better Government that sought to collect enough signatures from registered voters throughout the county to have a vote on possible changes to the county charter as part of the last election cycle. We fell short. The Dorchester Charter Commission has done what we were not able to do and added other proposals.

They developed a list of eight recommendations with explanations that were part of a presentation to the County Council earlier this month, and the council is asking the public to provide their thoughts on which of the proposed changes should go on the ballot in November 2024. Hearing from the citizens is always important, so you need to speak out in support of what your fellow citizens have suggested after months of work.

In November, whatever issues are placed on the ballot, fifty percent plus one voter has to approve the proposed changes that the County Council will have approved for consideration and vote. While we do not know how much public input from the voters is required for the County Council to act, the more people that tell them to place all of the proposals on the ballot, the more likely those proposals will be on the ballot.

That will allow for a formal up or down vote on each proposal in November after you, the voters, have had the chance to learn more about all of them and the pros

and cons for each. I am confident that as part of the upcoming elections there will be people who are for or against a proposal. I know that the Dorchester Citizens for Better Government will be urging passage of whatever is on the ballot, as these proposals make for good sense and help create better government. During our efforts to obtain signatures, we obtained over 1300 signatures in support of two of the proposals having to do with the county manager and transparency.

I would suspect that most of you who reside in Dorchester County, including its towns and cities, may not know what the proposals are. That is understandable. It is also understandable that all of them should be on the ballot so that you can give your voice to which ones you want and which ones you do not want.

The county charter has not been changed, I am told, since it was originally passed many years ago. Much in our world has changed since then, and one of the most important changes is that most larger cities, like Cambridge, and counties have gone to a form of government called council-manager where there is a paid experienced and full time manager for the day-to-day running of the government that includes the hiring and firing of staff, while a county or city council creates the vision, policy, and direction for the county or city for the manager to run.

The Charter Commission provided both an explanation for each proposed change along with a suggestion of the appropriate language. While those explanations and the proposed language are too long for this report, the proposed changes are these:

- **Add language that would solidify the difference between the responsibilities of the County Council and the County Manager.** We would like to emphasize:
  - County Manager is the only one allowed to direct employees
  - When position is vacant, search must start immediately
  - If position is not filled timely, alternative search measures must be employed.
  - County Manager must be available full time.
  - County Manager can not take direction from individual council members
  - Only the County Manager can hire and fire county employees
- **Change the requirements of the County Manager to remove the residency requirement**
- **Change the Administrative Review to require it be done in the first fiscal year of each new Council**

- **Change the requirements of the County Director of Finance to remove the residency requirement**
- **Change the due date for the proposed County budget**
- **Change the adoption date for the County budget**
- **Add language to section 606 to increase transparency and to insure that the most effective means are used to disseminate meeting information**
- **Add language to the County Charter to limit a County Council member to 3 four year terms (for a total of 12 years).**

I hope to be able to provide more information regarding the above proposed changes, but the important thing for you to do now is to contact your county council member (not city council) and let him know that you want to have a vote on all of these proposals in November.

Thanks for reading.

Steve