

CHARTER AMENDMENT FIVE

Candidates for elective office shall be nominated from the City at large, or from their respective wards, by petition, blanks for which shall be furnished by the City Clerk. Each petition shall be signed by not less than fifty (50) qualified electors and shall be filed with the City Clerk by 4:00 p.m. on the twelfth Tuesday prior to the city general election. Each elector signing shall add his residential street and number and date of signature. No elector shall sign petitions for more candidates for any office than the number to be elected to such office.



This amendment would eliminate the requirement that *primary elections* be held for the election of Mayor and City Commissioners. Instead, all candidates meeting eligibility requirements, would face off in the November General Election.

Holding a primary election is quite expensive. Direct costs for things like election workers, ballots and other voting supplies can exceed \$15,000. In addition, several hundred hours of the City Clerk's office staff time is dedicated to the primary election. Typically, these costs are incurred just to reduce the list of candidates for a given position down from three or four to two. The City believes it is more cost effective for all candidates to run in **one general election** with the candidate garnering the most votes for each position being declared the winner.

CHARTER AMENDMENT SIX

The ballot proposal would eliminate the Muskegon Civil Service System by repealing Muskegon City Charter Chapter XV. Presently, the City Charter provides for a Civil Service System, including the establishment of a Civil Service Commission and the hiring, promotion and discipline process. The amendment would eliminate the Civil Service System and permit the City Commission to establish a personnel system.

Many people believe that "Civil Service" protects against favoritism and other abuses in City hiring. In fact, Civil Service, in many ways, creates favoritism and limitations on hiring that can be detrimental to good government and efficiency.

Example: An important job opening is available. There are several people in the community who don't currently work for the City but who are interested in the job and have *excellent qualifications*. There is also a current City employee who is interested in promoting into the job, but is just *minimally qualified*. **Outcome: Under the Civil Service "rule of one", the minimally qualified City Employee gets the job. Outside candidates are not considered.**

In many cases, Civil Service provisions are redundant or have been overridden by union contracts.

The City's Charter and Civil Service system are more than 60 years old. Modern, well-run organizations have adaptable, accountable personnel systems to ensure the best candidates are hired. The City administration believes that taxpayers will get more value for their money by replacing Civil Service with a modern personnel system, fully accountable to the City Manager and City Commission, that can be amended by the City Commission as needed to adapt to changing needs.



NOVEMBER 3, 2009 ELECTION PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENTS

The City is proposing six charter amendments to the 1919 City Charter. The amendments would make City operations more efficient and provide tools to deal with the current financial crisis.

CHARTER AMENDMENT ONE

The ballot proposal would allow the City Commission to adopt an ordinance establishing the date by which the City's budget must be adopted. The amendment would permit changing the dates for submission and adoption of the budget.

The City believes adopting amendment one will result in more accurate and useful budget forecasts.

How will this change affect homeowners and taxpayers?

The proposed change will have no impact on homeowners and taxpayers.

CHARTER AMENDMENT TWO

The ballot proposal would allow the City Commission to establish the fiscal year by ordinance. The amendment would permit changing the starting date of the fiscal year.

Any date could serve as the city's fiscal year-end. However, September 30 or June 30 fiscal year-ends are the two most logical options. Changing to a September 30 fiscal year-end would make the City's fiscal year consistent with the fiscal years of federal, state and county governments. This would help grant accounting and revenue projection functions. Changing to a June 30 fiscal year-end, however, would make Muskegon consistent with fiscal year's used by the majority of other Michigan cities.

What really makes changing fiscal years an attractive option at this time is that doing so would provide a one-time increase in the fund balance of the City's General Fund. This would bolster the City's ability to weather the current financial crisis. ***The option is especially appealing because it would not increase taxes or cost residents in any way.***



CHARTER AMENDMENT THREE

The ballot proposal eliminates the specific date of delivery of the annual appropriation resolution to the Assessor. The amendment would require that the annual appropriation resolution be delivered by the date necessary to levy the City's and school's millage.

This amendment to the City's Charter is being proposed to allow for future flexibility in the levy of City property taxes. Currently, City property taxes are levied on December 1 of each year. The state, county, and many local schools generally levy their taxes on July 1. It is believed that, over time, the State will push for more local tax levies to be moved to the summer billing period to improve efficiency. This amendment removes the current Charter provision that would prevent the City from moving its tax levy.

Are there plans to change the City's current tax levy?

There are no current plans to change the City's current tax levy. Such a plan would require considerable amount of public comment and would be implemented over a period of time.



CHARTER AMENDMENT FOUR

The ballot proposal provides that the composition, meeting dates and procedure of the board of review shall be set by state law. The amendment would provide that state law would establish the schedule and procedures of the Board of Review.

Under current state law, local governments are required to keep boards of review (where taxpayers can appeal property values) in session for three days. Most city and township governments follow this state requirement.



The Muskegon City Charter, however, contains a provision requiring the City's board of review "remain in session for not less than ten nor more than fifteen consecutive days". Charter Amendment Four allows the City to make the change to bring the City's tax appeal process in-line with state law (and with the practices of other communities). The change would save an estimated \$10,000 annually in staff time and facility use costs.

Will I be allowed to appeal my property taxes if this amendment passes?

Yes, any resident will have the opportunity to make an appointment to meet with the Board of Review to appeal their taxes.