

1. What parts of the Charter should be considered by the Commission, without necessarily implying that you believe a change should or should not be made.

The three (3) most important elements for consideration, not necessarily in order of importance to you.

Any remaining elements, preferably in order of importance to you.

Answer:

I believe the Commission should review the entire Charter.

The three most important elements for considerations are:

1. The form of government, whether we should retain the City Manager/Council form of government, or switch to a Mayor/Council form of government, various hybrids, or other (Benevolent Dictator!).
2. Whether Councilmembers should all serve "at large" or if we should have some or all Councilmembers that represent specific geographic areas of Cleveland Heights (a.k.a. wards).
3. Provisions that will make our municipal government and elections more nonpartisan and less political.

Other elements for consideration:

1. Consider allowing Council to replace the President/Mayor and/or Vice President/Vice Mayor elected for a two-year term before the two-year term is up.
2. Compare our Charter to the Municipal League's model charter, and decide whether things included in the model charter but not in ours are worth adopting in ours.
3. Do the Departments listed (page 9) actually exist? Do we have a Department of Public Safety, per se? Haven't we outsourced the Department of Public Health?
4. The timeframes in the Article VII have been adjusted by legislation, but should they be changed in the Charter itself?
5. Gender-free language.

2. For each part identified in Question 1, explain briefly,

- (a) **why the item should be considered and if you think a change may be warranted, then**
- (b) **what the change should be and why.**

Answers: Three Most Important:

1. Candidly, the Charter Review was given impetus by a group of citizens that Council learned were working on a petition to change our form of government to a Mayor/Council form. Council wanted a rigorous consideration of options and hence formed the Charter Review Commission. I am interested to learn more about our options, but I do not personally believe that a change to a Mayor/Council form of government will make a difference to the underlying challenges Cleveland Heights is facing. Cleveland Heights is a microcosm of what has happened in the United States as a whole, namely, we are coming apart. Federal and state government policies have created conditions that are not conducive of the well-being of all citizens. Some of us are flourishing, and some of us are not. We see that in Cleveland Heights where market forces are

strengthening some parts of town, with major investments in newly constructed housing and home renovation, as other parts of town are declining in value, according to Cuyahoga County revaluations. We can make our current form of government work better with some of the changes I am suggesting. Please note that, to address Cleveland Heights' challenges, we have made or had a lot of changes in City staff and Council recently, which may have slowed us down as everyone progressed up a steep learning curve and changes were made. We are further along than we might otherwise be because of the professionalism that a City Manager brings to City government, even as we are all continuing to learn and adjust to economic and other changes. Over the past year or two, thanks largely to our City Manager, almost a half-dozen major studies to how best to move forward have been completed, and this sets the stage for intelligent and faster progress this year and in coming years.

2. I like serving at large. I like talking to people throughout the City and trying to figure out what is best for the greater good. People in the less affluent parts of Cleveland Heights may feel the City has neglected them, but I am more inclined to believe that those parts of town have been relatively unattractive for market-driven investments. Developers would rather serve more affluent residents on the expectation that profits will be better. I think it's important for those of us on City Council to understand what is happening and what the issues are all over town, not just in parts of the City. We especially need to avoid squabbling between different parts of town, because we are all in this together. The recently completed studies give us a focus and agenda that can now guide more rapid progress. Also, I expect the newly elected leadership for Council to be helpful in that regard.
3. I've already submitted a proposal for how Council selects its President/Mayor and Vice President/Vice Mayor. Please see that.

Among the "Other consideration": I believe most are self-explanatory. Regarding #2 on the list:

I made this comparison when I was head of the Administrative Services Committee. There are some differences between our document and the model charter. While our Charter could be improved somewhat by incorporating some model charter items, I decided that we could get by for more years without those changes. Since it was determined at the time that Council and the City had other, more compelling priorities to deal with, Council voted not to undertake a charter review at that time. It is perhaps worth redoing the comparison to see if adding some of the provisions from the model charter would make good additions. (I will be happy to provide my notes from this exercise if anyone wants them.)

3. Identify any change or changes you have observed in the facts and circumstances of the city (other than personnel changes in the City Council or City Administration) in the five (5) years since the on-cycle determination by Council in 2012 that no charter review was warranted. Note the changes that warrant this off-cycle review, and how any such changes relate to what you noted in Questions 1 and 2 above.

Answer:

Mary Dunbar's Responses to the Charter Review Commission's Survey of Councilmembers

Five years ago we had other priorities. We needed to focus on fixing the City's finances, passing a levy, dealing with very serious water and sewer issues, and repaving major roadways/completing several streetscapes.

We continue to face a number of challenges that have worsened over the past five years, though I don't have exact data on some of these. But I believe our poverty rate has increased. It was very low in 1990 but was approaching 20% last I knew. Foreclosures have been declining annually, but last I knew, they were still 250 per year. Following a national trend, investors are buying more single-family homes and renting them out; I suspect our homeowner base is declining. My sense is that homeowners who can afford maintenance generally made better residents than renters. Homeowners are more invested in our community than renters or landlords. Our Home Choice Vouchers (Section 8) homes had been declining last I knew. While many of these residents are good citizens and their landlords maintain the properties, there are exceptions that people in the northern part of town in particular have told me about. The previous police chief said that a quarter of the crime in our City came from the relatively small number (650-at-the-time households out of 14,000+ single family homes and app. 21,000 dwelling units overall, if you count apartments) of housing voucher recipients.

Most of these challenges disproportionately impact the northern part of Cleveland Heights, where houses are more affordable. In 2017, the county lowered the valuation assessments in the northern part of Cleveland Heights (17%, as I recall), pushed valuations for tax purposes in a mid-section of our city down by 7%, and boosted valuations for tax purposes in the southern part of Cleveland Heights by 10%. Instead of being able to share the property tax burden which largely supports our public schools (that's an over simplification – it's complicated) more equitably because of economic strength being more equal around town, affluent parts of town are carrying more weight. Changes in tax laws at the federal level intensify this situation.

Also, the state and federal governments have dictated school assessments that make our public schools look bad. No secret that those in charge of these higher levels of government want to support private and parochial schools. Problem is that children from low-income families generally test poorly, while children from more affluent (and usually better educated) families test much better. It varies by school, but many (not all) of our public-school students come from low-income families and test poorly. So our schools generally earn a low grade, and we are being "punished" with unfavorable ratings of our schools for being an inclusive community. These ratings make Cleveland Heights less attractive to potential home buyers. State policies also benefit eligible parents who want vouchers to help pay for their children to have a parochial school education; school levies do not support our public schools for as long a period as they once did.

The City of Cleveland Heights needs to move more quickly and aggressively now to create positive growth in our community. We need Community Reinvestment Areas (especially impacting the northern and central part of Cleveland Heights), a core group of reliable rehabbers to upgrade houses and sell them to homeowners (not investors), builders who produce new homes that will appeal to more affluent homeowners, programs to deal with vacant lots and vacant houses, better tax collection (lots of delinquencies), and collaborations with our public schools that produce positive results. We have several development opportunities (Top of the Hill, etc.), and we need to make those happen to strengthen our tax base.

We can do this and more with our current form of government. Changing to a different form of government won't solve our core issues. City Council and staff can get what needs doing done, with the right leadership and purpose – which we now (and I mean in 2018) have.

4. What parts of the current structure of the City government are: (a) serving the City well; (b) not serving the City well?

Answer:

Most of Cleveland Heights City services are impressive. Public Works gets a huge amount of work done and is very responsive. I've had the chance recently to observe both our police and fire departments in action, and I have nothing but praise for them both. Our parks and recreation facilities and their management are excellent, and we should be proud of these terrific community assets and how they operate. Finance seems to be functioning professionally, and Law has a lot on its plate, but seems to be keeping its head above water.

I feel that some of our other departments could use more staff to accomplish what is needed. They do a huge amount of work but could use more help to get what needs doing done.

Housing in particular does a ton of work to try to ensure houses are inspected and well maintained (at least on the outside) but could use more help so that taxes are paid, that we are setting the stage for renovation of existing properties, encourage high-quality (LEED Silver) new construction and strengthen home ownership. I have great respect for just-retired Judge Deane Buchanan but am hoping that JJ Costello, in collaboration with our Hosing Department, can accelerate the pace in resolving housing maintenance and other housing issues confronting our community.

Planning & Development staff also do an admirable job serving many needs, and have greatly benefited from the addition in the past year of two new staff members dedicated to Economic Development. This is starting to make a difference. This is an area where the agenda could be almost endless, so focus is very important. Greater focus is something Council intends to provide.

Finally, Community Relations has been greatly strengthened by the addition of Mary Trupo in public relations, though this is somewhat offset by the departure of Jennifer Kuzma in development. But in general, this area is seriously understaffed. The accomplishments in this area are awesome, considering how few get the work done. If we can figure out a way cost effectively to do more in this area, the City would benefit greatly.

Formation and funding of a CDC can help us meet some of our staffing challenges. Getting a CDC functioning is under way and should expand our capacity to get things done. Also, the Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) have done some impressive work on the need for better tax collection and research of important housing issues in our community, and we should collaborate more with them.

In short, a lot of pieces are in place to move Cleveland Heights ahead, and we now must capitalize on them to realize the City's potential. I am optimistic, because we have a lot of citizens who care about this place and our institutions, and who are dedicated to maintaining the gem our City already is in many respects, and to building on our strengths to become increasingly excellent in the future.