



2015-2016
CHARTER COMMISSION
City and County of Honolulu

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The City and County of Honolulu's Ten-Year Charter Review Commission Begins Its Work

By Jesse K. Souki, Chair, Charter Commission

Under Article VIII, Section 2, of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii, the City and County of Honolulu has "the power to frame and adopt a charter for its own self-government." A charter lays out the executive, legislative, and administrative structure and organization of government.

Revisions to the City Charter can be made in two ways: (1) by the City Council or voter initiative, or (2) by the Charter Commission. In either case, a majority of voters must approve any amendment or revision to the City Charter. The Charter of the City and County of Honolulu 1973, was last amended in 2012. The last Charter Commission amendments were proposed in 2005, and voters subsequently approved eight of the twelve ballot questions in 2006. The City Charter and amendments can be found at <http://www.honolulu.gov/cor/tch.html>.

Every ten years, the Mayor and Council Chair appoint thirteen members to the Charter Commission. Under the City Charter, the Commission's primary duty is "to study and review the operation of the government of the city under [the] charter." As an independent body, the Commission "may propose amendments to the existing charter or a draft of a revised charter."

The Commission works under a tight schedule. The City Charter requires the Commission to submit finalized proposals to the city clerk prior to September 1, 2016, so that proposals can be placed on the November 8, 2016, general election ballots for voter consideration. In addition, the Commission must publish a brief explanation of the amendments or revised charter in the newspaper at least 45 days before the election.

The Charter Commission had its first meeting in March, and a few meetings since. Commission meetings are open to the public and the public may provide testimony on agenda items. During the week of July 27, 2015, the Commission has invited City agencies, departments, and offices to help the Commission evaluate government operations under the City Charter.

Among other things, the Commission is interested in learning about what works, what does not, and what amendments or revisions to the City Charter might help improve City government.

In addition, the Commission has started accepting proposed amendments and revisions to the City Charter. Proposals must be submitted using the online form at <http://honolulu charter commission.org> or by calling 808-768-5093 for a paper version of the submission form. Proposals will be accepted through October 31, 2015, to allow the Commission time to hold public meetings, review submissions, and finalize proposals for inclusion in the 2016 ballot.

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