

## Let the People Decide



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On November 18, the Detroit City Council voted 4-3 against a resolution to put the question of whether the charter should be amended on the special ballot in February. The vote was in contempt of the people. Voters should have the final say in articulating clear expectations and priorities for city government.

Among the concerns of some members of the legislative branch is how the council could remove the mayor for conduct, how the city's corporation counsel is hired and fired and when special elections are held.

Many issues covered in the charter are vast and complex and so ambiguous that they need clarification. The recent issues involving former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick made us painfully aware that the charter language is not always as clear and decisive as it needs to be. It is also true that a proposed charter

amendment or establishment of a charter commission would not automatically result in changes to what is essentially the city's version of the Constitution.

What is troubling to me is that while there is general agreement that the current charter needs fine tuning, the fear of council by districts seems to be greater than the desire for a charter that allows for better governing. That's not for the council to decide.

Those members opposed to districts should put the question before the voters and mount a campaign to educate voters on the pros and cons the governance change. And while districts may not be a panacea, this debate challenges the most basic principle of our democracy – the ability of the citizens to decide.

Furthermore, the council must be held accountable to fulfill the intent of the Charter—not to fulfill the intent when it is convenient, or when it maintains a political advantage for some of its members.

The intent of the charter is clear. It clearly permits the council to place an amendment on the ballot or for citizens to directly petition the government. State law even mandates that citizens automatically have an opportunity for a charter commission every sixteen years. But why wait until the year 2018 when we have an

opportunity in the coming year to address some of the obvious deficiencies in the charter...as if the body of politics isn't demanding change now?

Government officials have a responsibility to operate in the interest of, and with as much openness as possible, not with disregard for the people they represent. The City Council is scheduled to reconsider the resolution on December 9, 2009. It should put the voters before their own interest and let the people decide which structure is in their best interest. If it doesn't understand this simple principle, voters give should them a reality check at the first opportunity.

Saunteel Jenkins, MSW is a former senior policy aide to the late Council President Maryann Mahaffey. Contact Saunteel Jenkins at [Saunteel@SaunteelJenkins.com](mailto:Saunteel@SaunteelJenkins.com).