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Hawaii News

20 Charter proposals will be on ballot

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Oahu voters will be asked in November to consider 20 changes to the city Charter, the Honolulu Charter Commission decided last week.

By comparison, voters in 2006 had to decide 12 questions dealing with 18 issues. Nine were approved and three defeated.

The commission pared down the number of questions from 27 proposals by consolidating some on the table when its meeting began Thursday. Commission Chairman David Rae took exception to the suggestion that 20 proposals were a lot for the average voter to contemplate.

The list is "as long as it needs to be," Rae said. "We started with 154 proposed Charter changes, generated by the City Council, the city administration and departments, public interest groups, Charter commissioners and the general public."

The most recent commission to present a larger number of questions did so in 1992 with 32 questions, 27 of which passed, Rae said. By comparison, in 1998 eight questions were presented, seven of which passed, he said.

The final list contains core issues that have been top-of-mind for the public, from governance at the Honolulu Police Department and operations and maintenance of the multibillion-dollar rail project to funding for Honolulu Zoo and government transparency, Rae said.

"It's crucial," he said.

With the package of questions now finalized, the commission will focus on ensuring the public is aware of the proposals.

"Education is important," he said. "We want people to understand what these are all about, where they come from, why they're there and what the issues are."



The questions and a digest summarizing them will be mailed to every household, if not every voter. Additionally, there will be advertisements in the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and the commission is hoping to get as much news media exposure on the questions and issues as possible, Rae said.

The proposals will be translated into Chinese, Japanese and Ilocano then submitted to the Office of the City Clerk by Aug. 22.

Among the most widely discussed, if not controversial proposals:

>> Proposal 1 allows the Police Commission to fire or suspend the police chief for any reason. It also gives the commission the authority to subpoena witnesses and evidence when investigating alleged officer misconduct. Currently, the Charter says the chief can only be removed "for continuous maladministration." The commission does not have subpoena powers.

>> Proposal 4 places the operations and maintenance of all city-owned transit operations, a "multi-modal transportation system," under the city's transportation services director. Currently, the Charter assigns responsibility over bus and paratransit operations and management under the transportation services director but operations and management for rail to the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation. The amendment also creates a rate commission to review and recommend changes for all fares and parking fees. HART retains responsibility over rail construction.

>> Proposal 9 establishes a dedicated Honolulu Zoo Fund and mandates that 0.5 percent of estimated annual property tax revenues be deposited into it. The fund is aimed at making it easier for the zoo to regain accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

>> Proposal 15 allows those holding elective city offices three consecutive terms of four years. The Honolulu prosecutor can now serve an unlimited number of consecutive, four-year terms while the mayor and City Council members can serve no more than two, consecutive four-year terms.

>> Proposal 12 requires city boards and commissions to be evaluated periodically to determine if they should be retained, amended or repealed. The exceptions would be the Honolulu Board of Water Supply, HART and those boards and commissions mandated by federal or state law.

>> Proposal 7 creates a city Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency.

>> Proposal 5 requires the city Affordable Housing Fund to be used to provide rental housing for those earning 60 percent or less of median household income for a minimum of 60 years. The current income limit is less than 50 percent of median, but developers are required to keep them affordable in perpetuity.



to honoluluchartercommission.org for the latest drafts of the 20 proposals.