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**Editorial | Island Voices**

# Charter process needs improvement

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On Tuesday, the Honolulu Charter Commission will hold several meetings to wrap up the business of “the study and review of City government operations in the City Charter.” One important task remaining is preparation of the report that will be provided to the next commission. It is therefore a good time to contemplate our charter amendment process and provide feedback to the commission.

The commission is appointed every 10 years and met several times a month over a year to arrive at the 20 proposed amendment questions on this year’s ballot. (Voters approved 16 of the 20 questions.)

The commission put out a brochure that included the questions and brief before and after descriptions. They also provided speakers for forums and interviews held before the election. Several proposed amendments, however, covered complex issues, and voters naturally turned to other sources to help them decide how to vote.

In some cases, “no” votes were recommended across the board. In others, more thought was given to the pros and cons of each question, but even then, two organizations provided incorrect information on one question. One organization subsequently corrected it; the other did not.

Some people have said we shouldn’t even be voting on changes to the charter — that it should be done by the legislative body, since they are far more familiar with the issues. As a member of the public who participated in many of the commission’s

meetings, I think it's important for us to have the opportunity to make these changes. The question then is, how do we improve the process?

I was surprised to learn that full texts of the changes are not available at the polls. While voters should do their homework prior to voting, full texts should be available as a resource for last-minute questions. In addition, full texts for short questions should be provided directly on social media. Links to longer texts can also be posted. This would promote more broad-based discussion and hopefully better understanding of the issues.

During commission meetings, one commissioner regularly pointed out the importance of notifying voters of the cost to implement the proposed changes. Some of the questions sound like good ideas, but I wonder if people understood the cost implications of a "yes" vote.

For example, question No. 6 requires the city to create certain functional plans and have regular updates. Of course we should have plans for our parks, wastewater and solid waste, but we also need to be aware that updates to these plans alone will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we aren't even current on the ones that were mandated prior to the election.

As the approved amendments are put in place, we will have an idea about the costs. However, voters should be provided estimates prior to voting whenever feasible.

The commission had the assistance of staff and a budget to cover things such as the booklet. It was clear early on that staffing was not adequate, however. As changes to proposals were discussed, drafts were handed to commissioners just prior to meetings, and I'm not sure the public was provided all versions of the proposal regarding grants-in-aid. This was important, because there was a question about grants issued through the mayor's office.

Additional resources should be provided to the commission, so that minutes can be posted in a timely manner, the commission's website organized in a logical manner and the public provided clear and accurate information.

I'm sure there are other improvements that can be made. Agendas for the Nov. 22 meetings are available at [honoluluchartercommission.org](http://honoluluchartercommission.org).