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Ask the Mayor»

# Let the people have their say on council-manager proposal

## Viewpoint

May 31, 2016

By CARMILLE LIM and MARK HYDE, For The Maui News

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We all want and expect that government services such as trash pickup, repaving of roads, park maintenance, etc., to be done expeditiously and efficiently. After all, as taxpayers we are footing the bill. But what happens when things don't get done? Who do we hold accountable: The mayor? The County Council? Department heads and/or employees?

Under Maui's current government

structure, known as the council-mayor system, it's not always clear. Often we see finger-pointing with no resolution.

Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of citizen advocates, there is an opportunity for change. The Maui County Council is considering whether or not to put a charter amendment on the November 2016 ballot and letting the people decide if they want to implement a council-manager system of government. Under this system, the mayor would remain an elected position, retain veto powers, make appointments to boards and commissions and represent the county. The managing director, appointed by the council, would manage the county's day-to-day operations.

This would create a clear accountability system. The majority of cities and counties across America use this system of local government and the Kauai County Council is also considering implementing a similar system.

In order to implement this charter amendment, the proposal needs to be adopted by the Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee and the full council by early August for the measure to be included on the general election ballot in November. Maui County voters would then have the final say on whether or not to switch to a council-manager system.

Some critics have questioned the timing of the proposal, asking, "What's the rush?"

This process has been anything but rushed. The discussion and call for change began in 2010 with the Countywide Policy Plan. The plan, which provides the policy framework the Maui island and community plans, called for "good governance" and to "evaluate and, if necessary, recommend modifications to the County Charter that could result in a possible change to the form of governance for Maui County."

In 2012, the Maui County Charter Commission recommended "that a task force be established to thoroughly review the structure of the County of Maui government, research other models of county governments and prepare a report."

To this end, late last year the council established a Special Committee on County Governance to consider a council-manager system. Thereafter and for the past five months, the special committee and the public debated this issue extensively, resulting in the proposed charter amendment. After nearly six years, now is the time for the



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council to take action and let the people decide.

While this is not a panacea, politics as usual has hindered county operations for far too long. We should expect and demand a government that is accountable and responsive to our needs. Join us in urging the PIA Committee and the full council to place the council-manager proposal on the general election ballot in November. Email or call the PIA Committee ([piacommitee@mauicounty.us](mailto:piacommitee@mauicounty.us)) and your council member and tell them that we, the people of Maui, Molokai and Lanai, deserve the chance to decide if we want a council-manager system to serve our needs and the future of Maui County.

\* Carmille Lim is the executive director of Common Cause Hawaii, a nonpartisan nonprofit that aims to protect the political process, encourage citizen participation in politics and hold government accountable to the public interest. Mark Hyde is a Maui resident and co-founder of MauiGAIN (Government Accountability and Improvement Now).

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