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No economic benefit should mean no council-manager

May 19, 2016
By PAUL KAILIPONI , The Maui News

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A proposal as momentous as a movement toward a council-manager form of government should utilize only the most objective and complete analysis possible. To this end, the Cost of Government Commission, a citizens' investigative body, has developed an evidence-based report evaluating aspects of economy and efficiency related to the council-manager form of government. The commission found that a council-manager form of government:

- * Will not necessarily result in lower expenditures in providing public service. Academic research comparing municipalities over time shows that moving to a council-manager form of government does not result in lower government expenditures.
- * Is not a necessary condition for professional, qualified management. Professional management can be found in both council-manager and mayor-council forms of government. Bolstering the professional qualifications for county management can be accomplished without a change to Maui's charter.
- * Will not necessarily reduce turnover costs for chief administrative officers (CAOs). Turnover would occur regardless of the form of government. Indicators of the rate of turnover show little difference in length of tenure for CAOs between council-manager and mayor-council forms of government.
- * Will not necessarily result in lower overall executive costs. Municipalities of similar sizes were found to have executive costs both above and below Maui's costs. Council-manager salaries in comparable municipalities can be well over twice that of Maui's current managing director.
- * Will likely have no effect on the acquisition of advantageous terms for county financing. Credit reports giving Maui an AA+ rating, the highest in the state, have more to do with the county's fiscal policy, tax base, economy and structure of long-term obligations than its form of government.

Based on its research, the commission does not support the adoption of a council-manager form of government because there is insufficient evidence showing that a council-selected executive officer would result in economy/efficiency gains for the county.

These findings do not preclude the commission from making recommendations that can support many of the values expressed by stakeholders around the county. The commission therefore made the following recommendations:

- * That care be taken to investigate the effects that a council-manager form of government would have on political influence, accountability, representativeness and checks/balances within local government. Before a change can occur, these other factors should be investigated as completely as possible, drawing from the best evidence available.
- * Update department performance measures to make them more operational, accessible, frequent and aligned with countywide plans.
- * That the Maui County Council be granted the right to vet mayoral appointments. The council would have the right to provide an opinion on the qualification of appointees without a right of refusal for the appointee.
- * A charter amendment toward a council-manager form of government should be proposed by a Charter Commission after a

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deliberative process that would be longer and more in-depth than either the Cost of Government Commission or Special Committee on County Governance could provide.

Each of these recommendations attempts to increase transparency and accountability through our existing form of government. Incremental changes to support openness in county operations can lead to the very improvements voiced by the public without the uncertainty associated with a wholesale change in our form of government. Without clear evidence showing that a council-manager form of government would improve government processes, it would not be prudent to make such a great change to our county with so many possible consequences and so few known benefits.

The commission encourages the Maui County Council and interested Maui County residents to read the Cost of Government Commission Report to find the evidence leading to these findings and recommendations. The report can be found online at www.co.maui.hi.us/179/Cost-of-Government-Commission. Questions concerning the report can be directed to the commission through county.auditor@mauicounty.us.

It is the commission's recommendation that the Maui County Council continue to take a similar approach to its own decision-making on this vital topic. Evidence-based, transparent decision-making is one of the only ways to ensure that potential changes to Maui's form of government are done for the good of all citizens.

* Paul Kailiponi is the chairman of the Cost of Government Commission.

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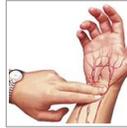
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