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Panel backs system with manager and elected mayor

April 30, 2016

By MELISSA TANJI - Staff Writer (mtanji@mauinews.com) , The Maui News

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WAILUKU - The Special Committee on County Governance on Friday afternoon voted to recommend to the Maui County Council a council-manager system of government which would keep an elected mayor.

The committee also will submit a report outlining two other forms of county government - a council-manager system with an elected mayor who serves on the council and a council-manager system without a mayor.

The 6-4 vote by the committee to recommend the council-manager form came after three hours of discussion and a presentation by the Cost of Government Commission on its findings on the council-manager system of government.

Commission Chairman Paul Kailiponi told committee members that a council-manager form of government will not necessarily lower county costs and will not necessarily take politics out of the management of the county. Removing politics and reduced costs were two major factors touted as benefits of a council-manager form of government.

Kailiponi said that the commission also recommends more time be taken to evaluate a change in government structure.

Those voting in favor of sending the recommendation to the council were Vice Chairwoman Madge Schaefer, Kehau Filimoe'atu, Kimo Haynes, Tamara Paltin, Ray Phillips and Jonathan Starr. Those opposed were Chairman Tony Takitani, Pua Canto, Dave DeLeon and Paula Friel.

Kay Okamoto was absent and excused.

The special committee has scheduled a meeting for 10 a.m. May 9 in Council Chambers to take its final vote on the resolution to the council, which could offer a charter amendment to be placed on the general election ballot in November.

The council established the special committee, which has a June 1 deadline to present its recommendations.

The recommended option would have a managing director who would be the chief operating officer of the county. An elected mayor would represent the county at functions, have veto power over bills and nominate members of boards, committees and commissions.

A second option would have a council, managing director and an elected mayor who serves on the council. The mayor would have duties similar to the recommended option but have two votes on the council and no veto power.

A third option removes the mayor entirely. The managing director would be the chief operating officer and report directly to the council.

In all three options, the council would select the managing director from a pool of applicants vetted by an independent recruiting firm. The managing director would oversee administrative duties, carry out council directives, prepare the annual budget and hire and fire all department heads, except for the corporation counsel, prosecuting attorney and the director of Water Supply.

Five of the six members of the majority advocating for a council-manager system recommended the first option because "it would put

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the right person with the required skills and experience in the position to manage the county's operations, while retaining a mayor with significant responsibilities and maintaining checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches."

The group also said the option would insulate county management from political influence, encourage best management practices in all departments, provide continuity in department leadership and ensure performance-based employment for key positions.

The Cost of Government Commission offered a contrasting view. Its report, which still is in draft form, is expected to be completed in the next two weeks, Kailiponi said.

In the summary of the draft report, the commission noted that:

- * There is no substantive difference between a council-manager and mayor-council form of government in terms of spending.
- * It could not determine whether a council-manager system would directly lead to more qualified chief administrative officers than the current mayor-council form.
- * The council-manager system would not necessarily reduce turnover costs at the chief administrative level.
- * The council-manager system would not necessarily result in lower executive costs. There is no guarantee the manager's salary and executive administration's costs would be lower than the current mayor's office.
- * The council-manager system likely will have no effect on the acquisition of advantageous terms for general obligation bonds or county financing.

After Kailiponi made his presentation, Takitani said that he agreed with the commission's report and that he didn't think a council-manager form of government would take out the politics.

"We are taking the people out of the process by not allowing them to vote on who is running the county," he said.

Vice Chairwoman Madge Schaefer, who has experience with a county manager system in California, disagreed, saying that people are not left out of government. Favoring the recommended option, she said it will allow the council and the mayor "to do the people's work" and to be among them while letting the county manager handle the day-to-day routine operations, such as fixing potholes.

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