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# Panel's 'heads down' academic approach misses the big picture

## Viewpoint

May 26, 2016  
By STEVE GOLDSMITH , The Maui News

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I served on the Cost of Government Commission in the Charmaine Tavares administration. It was clear to me then as it is now that Maui County would benefit greatly from a charter change to council-manager government recently proposed by the Special Committee on County Governance.

My view is completely at odds with the COG's recent report. The current COG report is based on a few academic journal articles dating as far back as 1966. As stated in the report, these articles use government spending per capita to compare cost effectiveness between governance models. This is a flawed approach. Spending alone does not determine whether one community is more efficient than another.

For example, if community A spends \$100 per resident on planning while community B spends \$90, can it be said that community B plans more efficiently and effectively than A? No. What tells the story is the quality and quantity of work gotten (output) for the money spent (input). Value equals quality and quantity divided by cost. Additionally, more recent literature shows an expected 10 percent savings for equivalent services delivered.

Another shortfall in the COG report is its narrow analysis of the cost of turnover between the two governance models even while recognizing that minimal turnover is a value to be achieved. The report then only looks at turnover in the chief administrator position, which, by the way, it finds to be 7.3 years on average in council-manager communities (better) and 4.2 years on average for Maui County managing directors (worse). Wholly avoided, however, is assessment of massive and simultaneous turnover of every Maui County director and deputy (except those appointed by commissions) with the election of each mayor.

Also missing is recognition that in our "strong mayor" model Maui's managing directors are political appointees. (See "Damage Control," The Maui News Oct. 11, 2015, where the current managing director is quoted as defining his role as "political" with a primary duty to serve the mayor, not the people.) Yet the commission acknowledges it did not even consider the effect of politics on efficiency, creating a huge analytical gap.

The COG's "heads down" academic approach misses the big picture - there are many things obviously broken after 50 years of strong/political mayor government. Here are just a few:

- \* Dysfunction between the mayor and the council, including name-calling.
- \* Appointment of directors by our mayor to departmental positions when appointees lack basic subject matter knowledge of the areas they are to lead.
- \* Breakdown in the county's ability to develop and execute plans, with current plans about 10 years behind schedule.
- \* Wholesale turnover of directors with every new mayoral term



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resulting in discontinuity, loss of knowledge and a steep learning curve for each new administration, not to mention discouragement of the workforce.

\* Lack of management accountability for performance, another key factor the COG admits it did not examine.

Lastly, the COG's recommendation that decision on a charter change should be punted to the next charter commission is off base on several levels. The next charter commission will not be convened for another six years, which could delay much needed restructuring until 2027.

Considering (1) that the Countywide Policy Plan adopted by the county in 2010 stated the need to explore other forms of government (to create greater accountability and transparency), (2) that the 2012 Charter Commission explicitly called for the appointment of a special committee to study council-manager government, and (3) that a Special Committee on County Governance was actually convened by the County Council in late 2015 that thereafter took testimony, heard from experts, studied literature and issued a report recommending adoption of a form of county-manager government, the COG's recommendation to delay decision on the recommended charter change ignores the current state.

It's time for the people to decide whether they want to continue with the current system of government or move to a more progressive and professional form that will be better able to meet the needs of citizens as Maui County government faces far more complex governance, social, economic and global issues in the future, well beyond those that existed when our current charter was adopted almost 50 years ago. I am ready to vote for change.

\* Steve Goldsmith is a Maui resident who served on the Cost of Government Commission during the Charmaine Tavares administration. He is a business consultant who has owned successful businesses in the fields of finance, retail, investments and real estate.

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