

CITY CONNECTION

On April 3, 2007, Stillwater citizens will have an opportunity to vote on eight proposed amendments to the City Charter. These amendments were recommended by a citizen Charter Review Committee established last summer by the City Commission.

The proposed amendments will be placed on the ballot as eight separate propositions. Proposition One calls for the removal of "masculine" terminology from the Charter. If approved, all masculine language would be removed from the Charter and replaced by "gender-neutral" terms.

Proposition Two will let the voters decide whether to change the name of the City Commission to "City Council." Stillwater is one of the few cities in Oklahoma that still refers to its elected governing body as a "commission", even though it has utilized a "council-manager" form of government since the 1960's. If approved, members will be referred to a "councilors" and all references to "commission" and "commissioner found in the Charter will be replaced.

Proposition Three will change the way the Mayor and City Commission are compensated. Currently, the Mayor receives \$100 for each "regular" commission attended. Members of the City Commission currently receive \$50 for attendance at each such meeting. Neither the Mayor nor Commissioners receive any compensation for attendance at special meetings, study sessions, or other official gatherings. Under the proposed amendment, the Mayor and Commissioners would receive a single monthly "attendance fee" as compensation for all meetings or official gatherings. The Mayor would receive \$750 per month and each of the Commissioners \$600.00 per month.

Proposition Four changes the method for filling vacancies in the office of Mayor or Commissioner. Presently, the Charter contains a complicated process that permits the Commission to fill vacancies by appointment, only if a small portion of an unexpired term remains. A petition driven election is required otherwise. The proposed amendment will simplify the process by authorizing the Mayor and Commission to fill the entire unexpired term of a vacant office by appointment, provided this is accomplished within sixty days that the vacancy occurs. Should the Mayor and Commission fail to meet this deadline, an election to fill the vacancy is automatically authorized.

Propositions Five and Six remove outdated language from the Charter. Proposition Five deletes language that authorizes the City to regulate "milk and milk products." This language is no longer necessary because federal and state entities regulate these products. Proposition Six deletes language granting the City Manager authority to make board appointments. No Charter provisions nor ordinances presently exist that require such action by the City Manager.

Proposition Seven will change the date that the Mayor and Commission members take office. Under the proposal, a newly elected Mayor or Commissioner will take office on the first Monday following certification of election results by the election board secretary. This revision was designed to reduce the possibility of "lame duck" tenures for outgoing elected officials. Other language in this proposed amendment will

permit a Mayor or Commissioner appointed or elected to complete an unexpired term to be eligible to run for two full elected terms. The current Charter language only permits a person who has been elected to complete an to then seek re-election to the office for one full term.

Proposition Eight will change the process for recalling a Mayor or Commissioner. Under the proposal, specific grounds must exist before the recall process can be instituted. No such grounds exist in the present Charter. The proposal also requires the City Clerk and City Attorney to prepare the recall petition once the process is properly invoked. The present Charter places this burden on the parties seeking recall. The proposal would replace the present "winner-take-all" election with a simple vote to remove an incumbent Mayor or Commissioner from office, and authorize filling any vacancy caused by successful recall under the normal Charter-mandated procedure. The proposal also eliminates the three-year City employment prohibition. A recalled official would still be subject the same Charter city employment prohibitions as other former Mayors and Commissioners.

Copies of the April 3, 2007 ballot, the full text of the proposed Charter Amendments, and the Report of the Charter review Committee are available in the City Manager's Office, City Attorney's Office, City Clerk's Office, the Stillwater Public Library, and on line at stillwater.org.

City Connection is brought to you by the City of Stillwater as a public service to provide regular information about City services and to respond to general questions asked by the public about their local government. Today's information is provided by the City Attorney's Office For further information, please contact Patti Osmus at 742.8209..