

Dear Multnomah County Charter Review Committee,

I served on the 2016 Charter Review Committee. Thank you for your service! I am pleased that you have been provided with more support resources than our committee had, and I think your public outreach is better too. Be aware that the end of your schedule will come faster than you expect and that there may be unexpected deadlines that appear at the end, so plan to finish your work early if possible. Better to have extra time at the end than to run out of time for critical work.

I have two topics that I want to suggest for your consideration.

First is an idea called "Rights of Nature" that could help limit environmental damage and fight climate change. I'm not an expert, so I'm providing you with a link to an article that explains the idea and its legal roots, a link to a newspaper endorsement of the charter amendment (later approved by voters) with Rights of Nature language in one Florida county, and that county's Charter Committee Report with the charter amendment language. I can't think of many things that could be added to a county charter to help fight climate change and environmental damage, but this looks like a viable option.

Here's a quote from the "Inside Climate News" article:

"The doctrine holds that nature and its component parts are not "things" or property but living beings with intrinsic value and an inherent right to exist. The idea is centuries old, existing primarily in Indigenous and other land-based cultures. But with pollution and deforestation threatening vast swaths of the planet and climate change amplifying sea level rise, extreme weather and mass migration, the concept of granting rights to nature has gained saliency and urgency across the globe over the last 15 years."

Article about the Rights of Nature doctrine and Charter Amendment measure: title of the article is "Does Nature Have Rights? A Burgeoning Legal Movement Says Rivers, Forests and Wildlife Have Standing, Too."

Link to the article: <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/19092021/rights-of-nature-legal-movement/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=aa098f8d-c36a-41ed-a381-f13b45319da4>

Orlando Sentinel Endorsement: <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/endorsements/os-op-endorsements-orange-county-charter-amendments-editorial-20201015-nlufib6zxjhrrnbvbcprnqnfrustory.html>

Orange County 2020 Charter Committee Report (see page 21 for the relevant Charter Amendment, and page 46 for the relevant subcommittee report): <https://www.occompt.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-CRC-Final-Report.pdf>

I currently serve as President of Forest Park Neighborhood (but this is a personal comment, not on behalf of the neighborhood). Our neighborhood includes a wide swath of unincorporated Multnomah County land (in addition to land inside Portland in and around Forest Park) that has many healthy headwater streams and high value forested wildlife habitat that helps keep Forest Park connected and healthy. We do our best to protect the natural resources in the area by working with the city and county, but a broad rule granting rights to natural resources could add critical protections for natural resources across a much wider area. This Rights of Nature idea was new to me when I read about it a few months ago -- it isn't something we considered in 2016.

The second topic relates to a Charter Amendment that we had little time to work on in 2016. We created a Charter Amendment, later adopted by voters, that limits campaign contributions. We all liked the idea of campaign contribution limits, but there was testimony on this topic from at least one person of color who was concerned that the rules in the Amendment would restrict their ability to raise campaign funds in ways that were not equitable. We did not have time to research the equity concern or to formulate changes to the proposal. Because several women of color have been elected to the County Board of Commissioners there may not be a problem, but you have time to research the details and equity considerations more thoroughly than we did, and you also have the fundraising results of a couple election cycles that might offer insights into whether the effects of the measure have been equitable. If the contribution limits that were adopted are not equitable you could propose improvements.

Best wishes,

Carol Chesarek

President, Forest Park Neighborhood