

May 29,2022

Dear Equitable Representation Subcommittee,

I served in the 2015-16 County Charter Review Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer a few comments on some topics you are considering with some accompanying data.

#4 Electing Commissioner District 2 in the same election cycle as other districts.

Please speak with the Commissioner currently serving in District 2. This request was made by an outsider, not the Commissioner for the District.

Because their terms expire in the same year, depending on how the terms of the Chair and District 2 work out, there is a 50=50 chance over time that the District 2 seat will be term limited at the same time the Chair position is open. So District 2 may have an advantage in being able to serve one or two full terms before running for chair, while other Commissioners would sacrifice 2 years of a term they have been elected to.

Any changes you make will have uneven consequences, including some you can't see which may be worse.

#4a Whether to elect all Commissioners at the same time.

Our Charter limits elected officials to 2 consecutive terms. High rate of re-election. Electing all Commissioners at the same time is highly likely to result in complete board turnover for a long time. You'd lose a lot of valuable experience and get a lot of inexperienced Commissioners at the same time, which would be pretty disruptive for county operations. Ask Chair and Commissioners for input.

#6 Increase number of county commissioners + whether to have multi-member districts

More Equitable Democracy's numbers show that Multnomah County's population currently includes 34% People of Color (POC), of whom only 23% are Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP). The maximum "power" for People of Color (POC) in their scenarios with additional Commissioners is 25%.

But Multnomah County has outperformed their 25% "maximum" model for 32 of the last 42 years (and is set to do so again for at least the next 2 years), even with lower populations of People of Color in previous populations. Moving to their model would likely result in fewer people of color being elected than we have historically achieved for the Multnomah County Board, and our elected people of color have all been women. The percentage of women of color we've elected has exceeded the total non-white population (including non-citizens and those under-18), in all but the 1990s. The details are in the attached PDF.

Why would we get fewer people of color in their model? Because with additional commissioners, including candidates elected with as little as 25% of the vote, we are more likely to revert to averages and elect more white people than we do today. The white voters of Multnomah County have demonstrated that a majority of them will consistently vote for women of color. But there are more conservative folks in the community who will find it easier to elect white candidates if they only need 25% of the vote.

	% Women of Color Commissioners or Chair	People of Color % of Total Mult. Co. Population
1981-1990	32%	9.1%
1991-2000	8%	12.1%
2001-2009	28%	23.0%
2011-2020	36%	27.7%
2021-2022	60%	31.2%

Why are is the county different from the city? We have term limits and districts.

If you reduce or eliminate staff, Commissioners will have fewer resources to respond to and support constituents, will be able to do less independent research into topics before the Board, will be less educated representing the County on other Committees and Commissions. They will be more dependent on county staff & lobbyists for information when making decisions, so you get less independent oversight and less staff to help them meet with to constituents. You lose checks and balances and undermine the quality of governance.

Fewer office staff means fewer entry point jobs – good living wage jobs where staff gain experience that helps them run for office (and makes the more qualified – know how to do the job if elected). People who don't want to run can still serve and shape policy.

We have a system that consistently elects women and women of color to positions of power. Why would we take that power away from them? Change to 12 Commissioner and/or reducing staff will reduce their power and influence.

My experience is that County government is not perfect, but is much more effective, and that it is much easier to be heard and influence change at County than at legislature or any other local government.

#2. Eliminate the primary.

We can't "eliminate" the primary -- there will still be a May primary with voting for many offices and measures (federal and state offices, including the legislature, judges, Metro, local districts (SWCD boards, TVF&R), bond & ballot measures). So dropping the Multnomah County races will result in very little savings. If you remove county races, people will have even less incentive to vote.

I appreciate having only 2 candidates to deep research for the fall. Sometimes we learn valuable things about candidates between the primary and fall, can change vote in the fall. As an alternative, you could propose sending the top 3 (not just 2) to the fall ballot.

Be wary of being swayed by voter turnout -- automatic voter registration at the DMV started in 2016. While that has been great to increase voter registration, we can't compare turnout numbers to previous expectations because many people with little interest are now registered. Note that independent and unaffiliated voters have substantially lower turnout for primaries, probably because they can vote in many fewer races.

#5 Allowing candidates to indicate a party preference.

More Equitable Democracy proposed this to help voters feel comfortable voting for women and people of color elected. We are already electing lots of women of color, so I don't understand the problem this solves. It seems like this just adds partisanship and incentive to show party allegiance in office. Does partisanship make our state legislature more effective?

Thank you,

Carol Chesarek