

City Charter Changes In The Works?

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It might be a while in the making, but Santa Cruz City government is in for some changes.

At its meeting Tuesday, six councilmembers beat their chests in support of revising the city's charter, however, at this point, the extent of change is unknown. As the poet said, some waves are ripples and others are breakers.

Any change in the city's charter would have to be approved by the voters.

At its meeting Tuesday, the council proposed that a 14-member committee examine the charter and make recommendations to the council on

what changes are needed in the city's government.

Some members of the council, like Mayor John Mahaney, are interested in "little changes."

Others, like Councilmembers Bert Muhly and Sally DiGirolamo, are more ambitious.

At the cornerstone of the conversation is the city's current form of government, in which the council sets policy which is carried out by the city manager and the rest of the city's staff.

Councilmembers are essentially volunteers. Each year, they pass among themselves the position of mayor, which is roughly equivalent to the post of chairman of the County

Board of Supervisors. The mayor presides at the council meetings, and also is on hand at ceremonial functions and groundbreakings.

The daily business is handled by the city manager, his assistants and workers in several departments.

What kind of change is in store?

DiGirolamo hopes for a substantial change. "The charter has to be changed because it has not been a help to people."

She said the city must become more representative.

"I can't ask anything of anybody at city hall. It takes four votes from the council to get a paper clip," she said.

She is unhappy, and her sentiments were echoed Wednesday

by Muhly and Councilwoman Charlotte Melville, that councilmembers have no say in the hiring of department heads. She said City Manager Dave Koester hires people to fit his own liking, and not to the liking of the council "which was elected."

She warmed up to the discussion, and soon hit at Koester's position of "total control."

"We can't get anything on the (city council's) agenda unless he wants it on. He's in total control."

She said she wasn't attacking Koester personally — "it's anyone who would sit in the office."

She and Muhly would like to see an elected mayor.

Muhly said an elected mayor would give the city a spokesman not available with the shifting of the post every year. He said such a mayor would be responsible for resolving political matters that the city manager should not have to do. He used examples of squabbles between the city and county, and the Downtown Association and the Downtown Chamber of Commerce, as disputes which a mayor — not the city manager — should resolve.

"I am not talking about, at this juncture, replacing the city manager with a mayor!"

Muhly and DiGirolamo found a friend in Melville when it came to protesting the council's being unable to par-

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ticipate in the hiring of department heads.

"As it is now, we can't even sit in on the job interview," Melville said.

The charter is more than 30 years old. And although the ultimate scope of the revision surly will be the source of a political battle, all the councilmembers agreed with Muhly when he said "we must change certain aspects of the charter."

Mahaney said Wednesday, for example, that the charter doesn't need to state that the city manager must inspect every ship that docks in Santa Cruz.

Each councilmember will appoint two representatives to the 14-member committee, and that committee's makeup may be revealing.

As one council member said, "You'll be able to tell from the membership on the committee what kind of revision we'll be in for."

Muhly said that the committee will first look into any minor revisions that could be placed onto the ballot by next spring's city election. Then, the committee will remain intact to study major changes in the city's charter which might not be acted on for a year or more.