

Mixed Reaction On SC Charter Changes

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A proposal for major revisions of the city of Santa Cruz charter got mixed reactions Tuesday from the Santa Cruz City Council during a study session with the city charter revision committee.

But the council was as one in praising highly the work of the citizens committee headed by Paul Niebanck in developing a revised charter for consideration.

Niebanck told the council that his committee and staff had given more than 2,000 hours of effort to its assigned task of analyzing the present charter and making recommendations for charter improvements.

Niebanck told the council: "We are proud of what we have done." He added that the proposed changes are in the committee's opinion responsive to requirements for change and that the total document "represents what the city is ready for."

Niebanck said, "The document we propose has integrity . . ." And he summarized the importance of the document with the statement: "It has a number of small but in the aggregate significant changes."

Proposed among major changes is the numbering of council seats so that in municipal elections council candidates will run for a specific seat and against a specific individual or individuals; a two-year term for the mayor; the creation of neighborhood commissions; setting of council salaries by the council; personal council appointments to all boards, commissions and committees; limiting terms of appointees to the terms of the council members who appointed them; requiring council con-

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firmation of the hiring of department heads; and allowing dismissal of the city manager by an affirmative vote of four, rather than five, council members.

The rationale for these and other changes was given to the council by Julie Minnis, Lorette Wood, John Laird, Nancy Eidam and Michaelangelo Rosato, all members of the committee. Niebanck chaired the study session and aided in the presentation of the material.

Some of the council members discussed frankly their reservations about some of the major proposals. But at the conclusion of the study session it was clarified that the council members were not speaking in opposition or in acceptance of the proposed changes at this time.

Reactions indicated most concerns involve the proposed numbering of council seats, the mandatory two-year term for mayor, the creation of so-called neighborhood commissions, limitation of council terms to two full terms and the appointments of commission, board and committee members.

On the numbering of council seats, which was discussed by Wood on behalf of the committee, Mayor Joseph Ghio and Council members Carole DePalma, Charlotte Melville and John Mahaney voiced a number of concerns, i.e., that it could lead to formation of political districts, that it might lead to unfair competition if a powerful group decided to run and finance a candidate for each seat up for grabs, and that the procedure might freeze out opinions.

Councilman Bert Muhly noted the other side of the coin is that under the present system issues related to individual performance by council members are not discussed.

Very strong concerns were expressed about mandatory two-year terms for mayor. Melville wondered if this would not be divisive, Mahaney was concerned about the practical aspects of it, Ghio was concerned that bitter battles for the post would create wounds that "would never heal afterward."

On the subject of limitation of terms for council members, several said that if the people want to elect a member for two terms or four or five they should be allowed to do so.

On the subject of popular election of mayor (which was considered but not proposed by the committee) Ghio said that the mayor of Watsonville, who is elected by the people, has far more clout than the Santa Cruz mayor because he stays on the job and has continuity of power and knowledge. "So Santa Cruz gets shafted," Ghio said. "The job needs continuity. A two-year term won't do. I feel very strongly about electing a mayor."

Procedures for handling the proposed charter changes will be decided by the council during its regular meeting next Tuesday.