

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

Special Meeting

June 9, 1971

COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY HALL

The meeting was called to order with Mayor Butler presiding.

CHARTER STUDY COMMITTEE

MR. PHILIP L. WHITE spoke in behalf of the Executive Committee of the Citizens for Equal Representation, which is composed of the Travis County Democratic Women's Committee, represented by Mrs. Edith Buss; Travis County Young Democrats, by Mrs. Cathy Engle; The University of Texas Young Democrats, by Mr. Dan Boyd; the Austin Branch of the N.A.A.C.P., by Mr. James Shear, its Second Vice President; American G.I. Forum and its Women's Auxiliary; and West Austin Democrats, by the Chairman, Mr. White. He named the officers of the Citizens for Equal Representation as: Co-Chairmen - Mrs. Edith Buss, Mr. James Shear; and Treasurer - Mr. Valentine Perez.

Mr. White said the submission of the petition would require the Council to hold an election in 30 to 90 days; and if any amendments were approved by the voters, there could be no further changes for two full years. They were interested in when an election amending the Charter could best take place, and what other propositions might be placed before the voters at the same time. Most of all they were interested in alternatives, if any, the Council would place on the ballot.

PROFESSOR ROBERT L. LINEBERRY, University of Texas Department of Government, spoke on the system of "at-large" elections, generally noting disadvantages of ward elections, such as seeking advantages for local ward with disregard for the community at-large. This was not the case now, as a different philosophy has emerged. The worst features of ward politics are not likely to be part of single-member districts. He believed the single-member district is the best and most representative way for Austin to elect its Councilmen, and pointed out its advantages.

PROFESSOR HARRIET MURPHY, Huston-Tillotson, and a practicing attorney, recommended the single-member district for the election of Council members, guaranteeing representation from all parts of the City.

MR. DAN BOYD, President of the University Young Democrats, said his primary reason to support the district system was the inherent tendency of the at-large system to undermine the equal representation of all parts of the City; however, the present Council elected under the at-large system is a very representative group of men. He did not believe this was an issue which should be decided on whether they concerned the City as a whole, or concerned simply one part of the City.

MR. GUS GARCIA, representing the New Generation in Austin of Mexican-Americans, expressed some of the feelings about electing the City Council. A Mexican-American has never been elected to the Council, nor to a County office at an at-large election of any kind. The important thing is that a segment of the community feels excluded.

MR. JACK OTIS, Chairman, American Jewish Committee of Austin, reported his chapter endorsed single-member representation by district.

MR. WHITE urged the Council to create a Charter Study Commission, representing all segments of the community, as quickly as possible, and have it report recommendations by about September 1, charging the Commission to recommend a plan for securing district representation on the Council. Such a plan could be placed on the ballot as an alternative to the "6 - 1" plan called for in the petition.

Councilman Friedman stated if there is a revision of the Charter, there should be an alternative submitted. The Commission cannot be tied that way, and the Commission may not feel districting is the best answer. He said Mayor Butler wanted the Commission to have that leeway. Councilman Nichols reminded the Council that they have been charged with a specific responsibility, as the filing of this petition will cause this to be put on the ballot for a vote of the people. He asked when they would present the petition. Mr. White replied a reasonable time to hold an election would be in the fall. Mayor Butler asked Mr. White how many members he thought should compose the Charter Study Commission. Mr. White suggested 14 and left the apportionment to the discretion of the Council, stating, however, his group would be happy to be consulted. Mayor Butler suggested perhaps each group could propose a person. He then inquired about the creation of a Commission and tying of its hands by recommending a particular Charter change. He would not want to pre-empt the Commission by charging it to recommend a plan for district representation of the Council.

Mention was made that other amendments to the Charter might be recommended - staggered terms for Councilmen, for instance.

In closing, the Mayor asked the Citizens for Equal Representation to submit ideas of the make up which would be fair and representative of the entire City for the Commission.

The Council then adjourned.

ATTEST: Elin Woodsley
City Clerk

APPROVED: Ray Butler
Mayor