

Summary and Explanation of Four Questions on Ballot for Election Day November 2017 to Amend Bethel Park Home Rule Charter

On this Election Day, November 7, 2017, the residents of Bethel Park will be asked to vote on four questions to amend the Bethel Park Home Rule Charter. The four questions, and the reasons for the amendments, are summarized here for the benefit of the voters. The Bethel Park Home Rule Charter was originally adopted in 1976 and effective in 1978. In 2016, the Bethel Park Home Rule Study Commission, consisting of 10 citizens of Bethel Park, submitted to Municipal Council its Report on the first comprehensive review of the Home Rule Charter since its original adoption. The four questions on the November 2017 ballot are some of the recommendations of the Study Commission that were adopted by Council for submission to the voters. (The full Report of the Home Rule Study Commission is available on the Bethel Park website, www.bethelpark.net).

Special Question #1

Shall Section 303. Term of Office, of the Bethel Park Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that the terms of Council members shall commence on the first Monday of January following the year in which elected, the time of which is to be determined and advertised by Council. If the Monday of January is a legal holiday, the organizational meeting shall take place the following business day?

Currently, the Home Rule Charter provides that the terms of office for Council members, and the organizational meeting, begin at 8:00 PM on the first Monday in January. Since the time the Home Rule Charter was originally adopted in 1976, starting times for meetings are earlier than 8:00 PM and sometimes the first Monday in January is a holiday. The purpose of this amendment is to allow the starting time for the meeting to set by Council at an earlier time and to provide that if the first Monday is a holiday, the organizational meeting will occur on the next following business day. Voters in favor of this amendment should vote "YES" on this question.

Special Question #2

Shall Section 802. Comprehensive Plan, of the Bethel Park Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that the Municipality of Bethel Park Comprehensive Plan be reviewed and updated at intervals no longer than ten (10) years?

Currently, the Home Rule Charter provides that the Comprehensive Plan be reviewed every 5 years. Experience has shown that review of the Comprehensive Plan every five years is both impractical and expensive. The Municipalities Planning Code requires review of a municipality's Comprehensive Plan every 10 years and the Study Commission concluded that a review at that interval would result in a more thorough review and a better Plan. Voters in favor of this amendment should vote "YES" on this question.

Special Question #3

Shall Section 1002. Submission of Budget, of the Bethel Park Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that on or before September 30th, the Municipal Manager shall submit to Council a proposed budget for the ensuing year with an accompanying message?

Currently, the Home Rule Charter requires the Municipal Manager to submit a proposed budget for the following year by September 1. Experience has shown that the September 1 deadline means that a proposed budget is prepared in July/August when key budgetary events in the current year have not yet occurred and the budget then has to be revised during the review process. The recommendation of the Study Commission was to amend the Home Rule Charter to have the proposed budget submitted by September 30 which provides more time for accurate information but also allows sufficient time for review and public comment on the budget before adoption in November. Voters in favor of this amendment should vote “YES” on this question.

Special Question #4

Shall Section 1003. Capital Program, of the Bethel Park Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that at least one (1) month prior to the date for submission of the proposed budget, the Municipal Manager shall submit to Council a five (5) year capital program?

Currently, the Home Rule Charter requires the Municipal Manager to submit a capital program at least two months before the deadline for submission of the proposed budget. As with the budget itself, experience has shown that this results in the submission of a capital program before key events have occurred and a more accurate capital program could be presented if the deadline was later in the year. The Study Commission recommended that the deadline be changed to one month before the proposed budget is submitted, which leaves sufficient time for review and comment. Voters in favor of this amendment should vote “YES” on this question.

Jim McLean
Chairman, Bethel Park Home Rule Study Commission