

The Honorable Sam Liccardo and Councilmembers
City Council, City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara St.
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: Item 3.4-Charter Review Commission

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers:

On behalf of the undersigned community groups, we believe that any process to consider revisions to the City Charter ensures accountability to San Jose's residents and puts the voice of voters ahead of special interests. We are concerned by the proposal from City Staff in a [September 11th, 2020 memo](#) urging the selections of Commissioners in December 2020 for a newly created Charter Change Commission rather respecting the will of voters and giving the newly elected City Council a voice in this decision. We urge the Council to wait until the new Council, which voters have entrusted with the future of our City, is seated in January to select Commissioners to this very important process.

This Summer, the City Council engaged in a heated debate about potential City Charter changes including a popular proposal to shift future Mayoral Elections to Presidential Elections years and a controversial plan to shift the powers and responsibilities of the Mayor, Councilmembers, the City Manager, and Department Heads toward a "Strong Mayor" system. After a public outcry about the lack of public engagement and many hours of debate, the Council decided rather than placing any changes on the ballot now to create a Charter Change Commission, as it has done numerous times throughout our history. The Commission will be tasked with representing the diversity of our community and engaging the public while examining whether and how to implement potential changes in greater detail.

Future changes to our City Charter could radically shift our City government and have wide ranging impacts on our community for generations to come, whether through giving greater voice to the disenfranchised or consolidating power for special interests. It is critically important that this commission represents the diversity of San Jose's residents, and that we create a process that is ultimately accountable to all of our people, not only the wealthy and powerful.

If Commissioners are selected in December, between one and three Councilmembers selecting Commissioners will no longer be serving on the City Council come January and will not be a part of considering the recommendations of the Charter Change Commission. These Councilmembers will be ending their terms and may no longer feel accountable to voters, and could prone to making appointments that benefit special interests rather than common good.

Given the timeline for completing the work of the Commission, there is no meaningful argument for why a Commission would need to be selected in December rather than one month later when the newly elected Council begins its business. As voters went to the polls in March and will again in November, they are voting for the future of their families, neighborhoods and ultimately their City. These voters

deserve a say in the selection of commissioners for the Charter Change Commission, which could have profound impacts on the future of our City.

In order to ensure accountability of the Charter Change Commission, we urge the City Council to vote to select Commissioners in January 2021 when newly elected Councilmember(s) and the voters who selected them can have their voices heard as we begin this important process.

Sincerely,

Dolores Alvarado, CEO, Community Health Partnership

Alison Brunner, CEO, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley

Salvador Bustamante, Executive Director, Latinos United for a New America

Maria Noel Fernandez, Campaign Director, Silicon Valley Rising

Poncho Guevara, Executive Director, Sacred Heart Community Services

Richard Hobbes, Executive Director, Human Agenda

Richard Konda, Executive Director, Asian Law Alliance

Derecka Mehrens, Executive Director, Working Partnerships USA

Sandy Perry, Executive Director, Affordable Housing Network of Santa Clara County

Reginald Swilley, Partner, Minority Business Consortium



P.O. Box 5374
San Jose, CA 95150
www.lwvsjsc.org
September 22, 2020

To Honorable Mayor Sam Liccardo and Members of the San Jose City Council
CC: San Jose City Clerk
RE: Item 3.4 Charter Review Commission

The City Council today will consider a resolution about the size, composition and scope of responsibilities for the Charter Review Commission. The League of Women Voters of San Jose/Santa Clara offers these comments:

1. We support the concerns raised in a memo from a group of civic and community organizations urging that **the appointment of members to the Charter Review Commission be delayed until January** to allow the City Councilmembers elected in November to make appointments from their districts to the Commission.
2. **The composition of the Charter Review Commission must be truly representative of a wide range of viewpoints and reflect our city's diversity.** In addition to interests named, representation should also include neighborhood, civic and community organizations.
3. We are concerned that the language of the resolution describing the responsibilities of the commission could be construed as directing it to recommend a "mayor-council" form of city government. We strongly believe that the commission should assess the current "council-manager" form, then look at other forms like "mayor-council". What is best for San Jose? **The outcome should align the authorities of the city manager, city council, and the mayor with residents' reasonable expectations for responsive and accountable democratic governance in a major world-class city.**

Thank you for this opportunity to offer our comments.

Sincerely yours,



Carol Watts, President
League of Women Voters of San Jose/Santa Clara
president@lwvsjsc.org