

msg 9/18

JENICE MITCHELL FORD FOR CHARTER COMMISSION

RESPONSE TO DETROIT FREE PRESS CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION QUESTIONNAIRE

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Occupation: Attorney

How long? 10 years

High School Degree: M.L. King High School – Class of 1992
Detroit Michigan

College Degree: Georgetown University, A.B., English Literature – Class of 1996
Washington, DC

Professional Degree: Northwestern University School of Law, J.D. – Class of 1999
Chicago, Illinois

Elected/Appointed Public Offices:
 Elected Office: N/A
 Appointed Office: City of Detroit Board of Ethics, Vice Chair

1. Explain in 50 words or less, why you are seeking a seat on the charter revision commission.

An effective charter revision requires the election of skilled, deliberative and uncompromised persons who are singly focused on ensuring that the Charter of City of Detroit ("Charter") establishes clear procedures that: (1) promote efficient operation of government; and (2) enhance the quality of services rendered to residents. **I am such a person.**

2. Describe any professional, educational or civic experience that has prepared you to play a constructive role on the commission.

I am uniquely qualified to serve on the City of Detroit Charter Commission ("Charter Commission"). I have spent the last 10 years as a practicing attorney, and for almost nine of those years I have interpreted the Charter as a member of governmental transition teams and City of Detroit ("Detroit") volunteer, appointed boards.

I am a 'wordsmith' by trade, who has drafted/interpreted, *inter alia*, law/procedures/policy and understand how the placement or omission of words can either keep you out of, or lead you into, litigation contesting ambiguous language. I bring this skill set to the table. Also, having spent so much time reviewing and interpreting the Charter, I have first hand knowledge of its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for possible revisions.

Further, I have served (currently serve) on many boards which require group consensus and working together as one body. I have the ability to work well with others, identify an individual's skill sets and organize group efforts accordingly. Finally, I am a lifelong Detroiter with connections/roots in numerous diverse community organizations.

Based on the above, I am distinguishable from any other candidate in this race.

3. What special expertise (legal, financial, *etc.*) would you bring to the charter revision commission?

See above Response To No. 2.

4. List any prominent individuals or organizations that have endorsed you, contributed to your campaign, or otherwise sponsored your candidacy.

I have interviewed with several organizations including both the 13th and 14th Congressional District Party Organizations. To date, none of the subject organizations have announced their slate(s) of endorsed candidates.

To date, I have not sought endorsement, contribution or sponsorship of any “prominent individuals.”

5. Which of the following best describes your approach to the charter revision process?

A. **The existing charter is fundamentally sound, and the charter revision commission should focus its energies on amending a ~~small~~ number of problematic provisions.**

However, I would add that to the extent citizens request a council-by-districts revision, to make such a revision truly effective, the Charter Commission should consider revision of charter provisions which may implicate “the way authority is apportioned between the mayor and city council.”

For example, “§4-113 Prohibition On Interference In Administration” prohibits a city council member from submitting a direct request to a city officer, employee or department head. As such, a districted city council member would be prohibited from directing the Director of Public Lighting to repair the darkened street lights in his/her district.

In my opinion, if districts-by-council is going to be most effective, a revision to §4-113, and possibly other charter provisions, must also be considered.

B. The charter revision commission should consider fundamental changes in the structure of city government such as the way authority is apportioned between the mayor and city council.

C. The charter commission should take a zero-based budgeting approach to its task, preserving only those elements of the current charter that have been demonstrably effective in moving the city forward.

6. If you could change only three provisions of the existing charter, which three would you focus on?

§ 2-107. Dismissal Proceedings.

Revise the “forfeiture” provision and possibly consider re-inserting an impeachment procedure. (NOTE: The 1918 Charter included a detailed impeachment process. The 1974 Charter introduced the forfeiture provision.)

§ 3-101. City Elections.

Revise language regarding the trigger for special elections (*i.e.*, the 30-day before or after the filing deadline).

§ 7-102. Assignment Of Authorized Function.

This provision prohibits the mayor from reassigning or combining the functions of the following staff departments: (1) Budget; (2) Planning; (3) Financing; (4) Law; (5) Human Resources; and (6) Environmental Affairs (“Staff Departments”). To the extent a mayor determines that the Staff Departments have duplicative functions, and desires to streamline such departments, s/he would be prohibited from doing so under the current Charter.

Revise this section to allow a mayor to reassign/combine functions of any city department, including Staff Departments.

7. Which of the following best describes your attitude toward the current rules for electing city council?
- A. Detroiters are best served by the scheme in which candidates for council run-at-large and each council member is accountable to the entire city.
 - B. Detroiters would be better served if most council members were elected by and accountable to single-member districts.**

However, I believe that council-by-districts will only be truly effective if accompanied by other Charter (and possibly Ordinance or department level policy) changes/revisions.

- C. I have formed no strong opinion about the at-large/single member district debate.
8. Do you support changes in the way the police chief and/or the police commission is selected?

As a candidate for the Charter Commission, I am not promoting a “platform” because a commissioner is not a policy maker who can (or should) promise particular revisions. All revisions must be developed after conferring with the public and then submitted first to the Governor of the State of Michigan for review, and then Detroit citizens for a vote. If the citizens want the proposed revisions and vote in favor, the revisions will take effect. If the citizens do not want the proposed revisions and vote against them, the revisions will not take effect. Simply stated, Detroit residents determine which revisions will result from the work of the Charter Commission. As such, my “support” of or “opinion” about particular issues will not have a determinative impact on whether a particular revision occurs.

Having said that, and having reviewed Article 7, Chapter 11 of the Charter titled in short, “Chapter 11. Police,” I do note the following opportunities for review and revision considerations:

§ 7-102. Board of Police Commissioners.

Possibly alter the method of appointing the five (5) member board of police commissioners ("Police Commissioners"). The Police Commissioners could be appointed, akin to how members of the City of Detroit Board Of Ethics ("Board of Ethics") are appointed: (1) two mayoral appointments; (2) two city council appointments; and (3) one joint mayoral/city council appointment.

§ 7-108. Complaints.

§ 7-109. Resolution of Complaints.

Consider whether complaints should be submitted to, and resolved by, an independent Detroit department/agency. Such a Detroit department/agency would operate akin to the Detroit Department of Administrative Hearings or Board of Ethics.

9. What changes would you support, if any, in the governance of the city's two employee pension funds?

To date, I have not formulated an opinion (pro or con) regarding any such changes except I note an opportunity for the following revision consideration:

§11-103. Principles Applicable In Administering Plans.

1. The board of trustees of the general retirement system shall consist of:
 - Reduce the number of members from retirement system from five (5) to four (4)
 - Add a citizen, non- employee, appointed by city council, subject to approval of appointee

10. Would you commit to participate in one or two public candidate forums sponsored by the Free Press?

Yes.