

Jenice Mitchell Ford

Age: 34

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Felony Convictions: None

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What do you consider to be your relevant experience that qualifies you to be a Charter Commissioner?

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.

I am uniquely qualified to serve on the City of Detroit Charter Commission ("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 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.

How do you feel about Detroit's current "strong mayor" system of government?

The strong executive form of government has proved effective in Detroit, the State of Michigan and the United States of America. Recent events aside -- the strong mayor form of government does work.

To that end, I favor maintaining the current "strong mayor" form of government but propose revisions which provide clear language regarding checks and balances with delineated consequences for contrary behavior.

How do you think we should change the City Charter to improve the Ethics and Accountability of our elected and appointed city officials?

Should the citizens desire to "strengthen" §2-106 of the Charter, City of Detroit Ethics Ordinance ("Ethics Ordinance") and the City of Detroit Ethics Board ("Ethics Board"), a multi-step process may be employed.

First, the public should be advised that the: (1) current Ethics Ordinance is aspirational in focus and was not intended to be punitive; and (2) Ethics Board is limited to public admonishment and is without authority to enforce penalties, including removing an elected official from office.

Second, §2-106 of the Charter and Ordinance could be revised to include mirror language regarding the "appearance of impropriety." For example, the Charter references "appearance of impropriety" but the Ordinance does not define or provide examples of same. Other possible revisions could include imposing: (1) lobbyist registration and reporting requirements; (2) post-employment restrictions on public servants as it relates to contractors/entities with whom a public official may have had some influence or participation; and (3) imposing a specific dollar amount on gifts that can be accepted by public officials.

Third, review, and possibly include provisions from, other ethics ordinances such as those used in Atlanta, Georgia, Houston, Texas, Chicago, Illinois, Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Do you favor electing City Council by districts? If NO - Why? If YES -What kind of district structure do you foresee?

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 "favor for" or "disfavor of" an issue will not have a determinative impact on whether a particular revision occurs.

Having said that, on a basic level and as a resident I believe that a Detroit City Council ("City Council") member will be more responsive to a citizen's request to repair a street light, secure an abandoned building or increase police presence, if s/he is also effected by the same darkened street light, unsecured abandoned building or lack of police presence.

However, I also believe that council-by-districts can only be most effective if accompanied by other Charter (and possibly ordinance and/or department level policy) changes/revisions. For example, "§ 4-113 Prohibition On Interference In Administration" prohibits a City Council member from submitting a

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

Finally, as a resident, I would support a revision proposal for council by districts where some members are districted and others are at-large.

What should be the guiding principles under which Charter Commission should identify, deliberate, and address issues?

Having reviewed the Charter, I do note that there are a plethora of opportunities for revision considerations. However, I do not opine that each and every provision of the Charter requires revision. For example, there are provisions which appear to be unambiguous, relevant to current City of Detroit ("City") operations and may not require revision. A few examples include, but are not limited to: (1) §4-115; (2) 6-405 through 6-408; and (3) much of Article 9.

To that end, I don't believe the Commission should start with a blank slate. Instead, the Commission should, via guidance from, and in conjunction with, the citizens -- identify those areas which require revision. Once determined, approach proposed revisions without emotion but using a calm, deliberative process. Such a process should be informed by some of the best practices as outlined in National Civic League's "Guide for Charter Commissions" or "Model City Charter."