

January 17, 2022

Chair Cisco and Members of the Charter Review Committee,

I am writing to you today to express my support for a revision to the Santa Rosa City Charter calling for the implementation of a “strong” elected Mayor position for the city. I know this idea has been discussed and debated over the last several decades, as the city population has grown from less than 100,000 people to almost 180,000. I have spent the last 40 years living and working in the land use planning and architectural profession here in Santa Rosa. I spent 3 years on the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, 6 years on the Planning Commission and a year on the Mayor’s Open Government Task Force, so I have had firsthand experience with how city policy can get sidetracked through the implementation process. Now that the city has moved to district elections, we no longer have an elected official that represents the entire electorate with the mandate, and authority, to implement citywide community benefitting policy. Under the current city structure, we have a City Manager that manages over 1,100 staff members and serves at the pleasure of the City Council, or more accurately, 4 members of the City Council since it takes a majority council vote to replace them. I live in District 2, which simply means we have no say in how 6 other districts elect their representatives even though the collective choices of those districts can have a profound impact on the city as a whole. Because of the current pay scale for council members, we generally have a council that is either those that are retired after a lifetime of work or have another full-time job in addition their council responsibilities, which are enormous for a city of this size. With an appropriately paid elected Mayor, needing a majority of the entire electorate to take office, we would now have a representative voice in not only our districts but also someone who’s fulltime job is to look out for the interests of the entire city. In addition, we would have an elected official who is accountable to the entire city, not just to the constituency of a particular district. A mature city of this size, which has moved to district elections for more equitable representation, needs to now close the loophole in a government structure that is accountable to both the district constituency and the entire community at large. I have heard debate that the city should not put so much “power” in one person’s hands, but isn’t this the basis of a representative democracy? The city of Santa Rosa has profound and difficult obstacles to overcome as we have matured from a small community to one of the largest cities in California. The current City Manager/Council structure has limitations that a fulltime elected Mayor could help balance and in fact, give citizens greater access to policy development and the political process. This structure, along with district elected council members, would potentially give citizens much more influence and equitable access to the functions of local government. Since there are community solutions, that marginally impact individual districts, but collectively benefit the greater long-term social and economic goals of the entire city, an elected Mayor would create a dedicated representative focused on the long-term social and economic health of our city. If they aren’t doing their job, we have the opportunity every 4 years to vote them out, this is constructively the basis, and benefit, of the democratic process.

I know these are difficult decisions, but I encourage the Charter Review Committee to put this option in front of the city voters and allow them to make the arguments both for, or against, this important community decision.

Sincerely,



Peter A. Stanley