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Subject: [EXTERNAL] Online Form Submittal: Charter Review Committee Submission Form

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Charter Review Committee Submission Form

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Comments, Questions or Concerns	WHAT MR. OLSON WOULD HAVE SAID ... IF SOMEONE HAD ASKED!

At the Committee's June 3 meeting, Mr. Olson, a member of Frederick County's latest CRC, discussed in some detail how that body operated and certain matters that body considered. Absolutely astounding, to say the least, is that no member of this Committee asked Mr. Olson why the Frederick CRC did not recommend amending that County's charter to raise the salary floor for its county executive above the current (\$95,000) level – a matter that he did not mention in his discussion.

Had anyone asked, Mr. Olson surely would have explained in pertinent detail that it was not because the Frederick County CRC failed to consider the matter and provided the following facts.

As the Frederick CRC's scorecard (at Ref. 19) shows, the salary raise was proposed, moved to workshop (with Mr. Olson's vote) and thereafter rejected (with Mr. Olson's vote). Thus, unless an increase is approved by the Frederick County Council, the county executive's salary will not be more than \$95,000 after the next election. To be sure, it could be more

than that if the Council decides to increase the executive's salary, and, given the County's very substantial wealth and tax revenue and its rapid growth rate, that may well occur.

No doubt Mr. Olson would attribute the Frederick CRC's decision to the written analysis presented by its "Floor Leader" on the salary raise issue (another member, not Mr. Olson), who stated, in pertinent part (emphasis added):

...it is important to note that much of the issues to be considered are outside the purview of the Charter Review Commission. Rather duties for adjusting compensation for the County Council and the County Executive are assigned to the Compensation Review Commission. That commission is governed by Article 25, Subsection 5(AA), of the Annotated Code of Maryland and will be addressing these issues in the following year for Council review.

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- Cost Neutral Charter Government : Given how much this was raised as a benefit of charter government, it would be prudent to be careful about raising costs so soon after elections.

- Attracting Quality Candidates/Barriers to Participation : This is heightened due to some of the aforementioned issues; however the most important reminder is that the county executive, unlike the county council was not envisioned as a part time job. There are benefits to establishing a competitive salary in order to avoid corruption, attracting quality candidates and providing just compensation. That said, there are also important considerations that surround whether the County would want candidates that may be driven toward the position due to its monetary pay out.

Action : According to the Charter, this is fully within the purview of the Compensation Review Commission, which can provide further analysis in more detail on the County Executive and the path forward for salary compensation.

It appears that charter review bodies do not address the matter of the executive's salary. I have reviewed the charters in the other counties with an executive regarding a specified salary floor in their charters. Here is that information:

Anne Arundel \$30,000 (section 401)

Baltimore none specified.

Cecil \$98,000 (section 406)

Frederick \$95,000 (section 406)

Hartford \$27,500 (section 306)
Howard \$18,000 (section 302)
Montgomery none specified.
Prince George's none specified.
Wicomico \$85,000 (section 406)

Interestingly, in those counties with the highest actual executive's salary, the charter is silent, and the matter is left to action by the Council with such recommendations as it desires to obtain. In others, the actual salary is much more than the floor level specified in the charter. For example, the salary floor in Howard County's charter (\$18,000) dates from when it adopted the charter with executive form of government (1968) and the population there was about 60,000; now the population is about 325,000 and the actual salary is \$195,800 in what is now the wealthiest county (per capita) and fastest growing in Maryland. *

In short, it appears the charter review bodies in these counties do not act as a quasi-salary review body and leave that role to the appropriate process and decision makers, just as Frederick County's CRC has just done, with Mr. Olson's vote, as he surely would have explained – had anyone asked.

COMMENT

This Committee should reconsider and rescind its recommendation to raise the minimum salary of the Wicomico County Executive currently specified in the Charter by more than 43% to \$120,000, a level that is greatly in excess of the floor in the much wealthier Frederick County and also in Cecil County (\$98,000), which is also wealthier than Wicomico County, not to mention in any of the "big-4" metro counties. As things now stand, the salary can be increased pursuant to recommendation of the Compensation and Allowance Commission in accordance with section 406 of the Charter (i.e., action by this body is not necessary for that to occur).

Although my research is not comprehensive, it appears that the charter review committees in other counties have consistently and without exception declined to recommend raising the minimum salary amount that was initially stated in the charter in their respective county – as the Frederick CRC did in 2019 -- or to recommend adding a floor salary in those charters that do not specify such an amount.

* Today it seems unbelievable that in 1940, the population in

Wicomico County (then, about 35,000) was twice that of Howard County (then, about 17,000). Since then, the population in the latter has increased by nearly 2,000%, whereas in Wicomico it has increased by about 200%. The growth differential since 1940 is reflected in the change in the once largely rural nature of Howard County – the 1940 census classified the population there as 100% rural, whereas Wicomico's was classified as 61% rural, 39% urban, with about 37% living in the City of Salisbury. The largely rural nature of Howard County continued into the 1960s, when "Columbia" was established by the Rouse Company ("Howard Research and Development") – I'm speaking from personal knowledge, having grown up and lived there until about that time, when the population level reached rough equivalency with Wicomico due to the much greater residential and business growth that began to occur in Howard County shortly after World War II.

In Frederick County, the population increase that has occurred since 1940, when its population was about 57,000, has been about 400%; it is now about 269,000. The growth differential continues – the 2020 census data shows that Howard and Frederick were the fastest-growing Maryland counties since 2010, well above the state average, whereas the growth rate in Wicomico County was somewhat less than the state (and national) average, and it has slowed significantly since the 2010 census.**

State data also shows that as these counties have changed from mostly rural to largely (or considerably more) urban, their wealth and tax revenue has also increased much greater, both aggregate and per capita, than in Wicomico County. That trend is continuing and likely to do so for the foreseeable future. It's simply a matter of "location, location, location."

** Several Maryland Counties – including Somerset, Dorchester, Talbot and Kent apparently lost population after the 2010 census, according to the 2020 census data that was recently released.

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