

ABOUT CHARTER AMENDMENTS – November, 1940 –

(A continuation of last week's JUST A SECOND)

No. BB - Amendments to the Old City pension plan (Taxpayers Only)

When the City Pension Plan was approved in 1937, it was permissive for certain City employees to choose between the NEW and the OLD plans - the older employees choosing the old plan because it was more liberal to them, which was the basic reason the NEW plan was adopted. But the OLD pension plan had serious defects. For instance, there was no compulsory retirement age - employees could and did remain on the active list long after they could perform their duties efficiently - which means the City pays twice for one job.

This amendment seeks to correct this difficulty by providing that the retirement age of the NEW and the OLD plans be the same - 65 years with extensions to age 69. Also, there is a provision for the payment of pensions to employees aged 65 with 15 years of service, clarifying the present provisions.

Both provisions would improve the public service.

No. A - Payment of City Taxes on Legal Holidays

No. B - Payment of City Taxes - December 31

These two amendments cover minor corrections to the present Charter. No. A adds a new section to provide that when the last day of payment falls on a Sunday or legal holiday, the taxes can be paid the next business day without penalty. Such course is at present sanctioned by common law and tradition.

No. B provides that the last date of payment of current taxes shall be December 31, not December 30, as at present. The amendment is minor, but illustrates the carelessness with which Charter amendments are sometimes submitted to the people. In October, 1935, and again in April, 1937, these same two sections were amended, and both containing the December 30 provision. In the interests of economy, if for nothing more, sufficient diligence might have been exercised to cure apparent clerical errors.

Both amendments are innocuous, although one is perhaps unnecessary.

No. C - Parks and Boulevards and Recreation Departments Consolidation

For years there has been discussion of possible economies by consolidation of departments and functions within the government of the City of Detroit. This amendment is the first tangible evidence of such simplification in the administrative organization.

The proposed amendment combines the present Department of parks and Boulevards with the Department of Recreation - in a short Charter amendment which provides that the combined department shall have all of the powers and duties of each separately.

The proposed consolidation is in line with the policies and practices of most large cities. Parks at one time were considered landscapes - to be viewed, admired, and left alone. Modern concepts of recreation demand active utilization of all recreational facilities, both parks and playgrounds, and conversion of all possible space for public enjoyment.

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For some reason, the Council excluded the Zoo from the originally proposed consolidation, although its inclusion would be logical and would permit greater economies. Also, for some reason, Council replaced a single department head with a four-man commission to be in control.

Although Detroit has had the services of many fine public-spirited citizens on certain commissions, the history of commissions is not all good. On the contrary, commissions are a trend away from the modern practice of centralized responsibility, and toward the theories of the 1880's when boards and commissions controlled Detroit and many other cities.

These changes by the Council may make further amendments necessary in the future. But the present proposal is highly beneficial, will simplify government, make for economy, and follows the practice of other large cities.

No. D -- Parks and Recreation -- Consolidation of Funds

No. E -- Parks and Recreation -- Boulevards to Department of Public Works

These two amendments are but a part of the consolidation of the Parks and Boulevards Department with the Recreation. Department discussed above. Because of an antiquated provision of the Charter setting up funds for principal departmental accounts, it is essential that provision be made for consolidation of the two funds. Time did not permit a thorough revision of this section of the Charter so as to modernize the entire accounting system, as should be done soon.

Since the 1918 Charter, boulevards have been a direct responsibility of the Department of Parks and Boulevards on the theory that they are parkways not streets. The result has been the duplication of cleaning and maintenance crews for the boulevards and for the other City streets. The Department always had charge of trees and parkways and will continue so in the future.

The amendment transfers boulevards to the Department of Public Works, which is in accordance with the best practice. As a matter of fact, the Department of Public Works has been doing this work for the Department of Parks and Boulevards for some time on a contract basis.