

Citizens Research Council of Michigan

625 SHELBY STREET, SUITE 1B, DETROIT, MI 48226-3220 • (313) 961-5377 • FAX (313) 9614)648
1502 MICHIGAN NATIONAL TOWER, LANSING, MI 48933-1738 • (517) 485-9444 • FAX (547) 485-0423

Detroit City Charter Revision

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On November 2, 1993, as provided in the 1974 charter, voters of the City of Detroit will determine whether a charter commission will be established to revise the current charter. This series is being financed in part by grants from Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, Hudson-Webber Foundation, and Matilda R. Wilson Fund, and NBD Bank.

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TERM LIMITATIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Under the home rule provisions of the Michigan Constitution of 1963 and the Home Rule Cities Act, a city charter shall provide for the election of a mayor and a legislative body and for the election or appointment of other officers including a clerk, a treasurer and an assessor. The length of the term of office of these officials is established in the city charter and the charter may limit the number of terms of office that elected public officials can serve (term limitations). In the Detroit charter, the term of office of the elected officials (mayor, council and clerk) is set at four years and there are no term limitations.

Term limitations are an emerging public policy issue. At the November 1992 general election, Michigan voters adopted an amendment to the state Constitution limiting the number of terms which may be served by the state's congressional delegation (three-two-year terms for the house and two six-year terms for the senate), state legislators (three two-year terms for the house and two four-year terms for the senate) and for the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, and attorney general (two four-year terms). The result in Michigan was consistent with the national trend: in all, 15 states have enacted state legislative term limitations.

There has been a similar trend at the local level. According to data collected by the International City Management Association, nine of the 20 most-populous U.S. cities limit the terms

of office of both the mayor and the council and a tenth limits the term of the mayor only. While none of the 20 most-populous cities in Michigan currently has term limits, 17 smaller Michigan cities reported term limits for the mayor or council or both. The most common term limit in these cities is eight years (two terms of four years). (See Table.)

The number of terms of office of elected officials in Detroit has been relatively long. During the 20 years of the Detroit charter there has been one mayor and one city clerk and only 17 individuals have served on the nine-member council. Of the nine incumbent council members, one has served six terms (not consecutive), five have served five terms and three have served one term or a partial term.

Proponents of term limitations argue that it will increase accountability by replacing career elected officials with citizen officials and will bring new talent and ideas to the process. Term limitations also increase electoral competition by limiting the inherent advantages of incumbents.

Opponents argue that term limitations are unnecessary because the voters can already "throw the rascals out" at any election. The turnover of elected officials resulting from term limitations will eliminate valuable experience and continuity and make officials more dependent on unelected staff members.

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**TERM LIMITATIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS AMONG THE 20 MOST-POPULOUS
U.S. CITIES AND SELECTED MICHIGAN CITIES**

City	Maximum Number of Consecutive Terms		Length of Term (years)	
	Mayor	Council	Mayor	Council
U.S. Cities:				
Baltimore	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Boston	No Limit	No Limit	4	2
Chicago	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Columbus	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Dallas	2	4	4	2
Detroit	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Houston	2	2	2	2
Indianapolis	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Jacksonville	2	2	4	4
Los Angeles	2	2	4	4
Memphis	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Milwaukee	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
New York	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Philadelphia	2	No Limit	4	4
Phoenix	2	2	4	2
San Antonio	2	2	2	2
San Diego	2	2	4	4
San Francisco	2	2	4	4
San Jose	2	2	4	4
Washington D.C.	No Limit	No Limit	4	4
Michigan Cities:				
Allegan	2	No Limit	1	4
Bay City	3	3	2	2
Caspian	2	No Limit	2	2
Cheboygan	2	3	2	4
E. Grand Rapids	No Limit	2	4	4
Essexville	3	3	2	2
Harbor Springs	3	3	2	2
Hart	2	2	2	3
Hillsdale	No Limit	2	4	4
Imlay City	2	2	2	4
Ishpeming	2	2	2	4
Marquette	No Limit	2	1	3
Owosso	No Limit	2	2	4
Plymouth	2	2	2	4
Rockwood	4	4	2	4
South Haven	4	2	2	4
Whitehall	2	3	2	4

Source: International City Management Association, 1991 Form of Government Survey (209 of 273 Michigan cities responded); direct inquiries by Citizens Research Council.