

MacRo Report Blog

Public shows support for charter

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Support of Frederick County's proposed charter came from the public Wednesday night, but with some concerns.

About 40 residents came out for what was the last chance for the public to speak for or against what could define the county's government.

Nearly all thanked the 12-member board for its work during the past 16 months, but several indicated concern.

"No charter is perfect. No charter will please everyone," said Claire Kondig, president of the Frederick County League of Women Voters. "We continue to support charter government with the proper checks and balances."

Should the charter get approved, it would change the county's form of government to include an executive to handle the day-to-day operations and council members to oversee other issues.

There was concern over the size of the council -- it stands at seven members including two at-large seats and the rest divided into districts -- and the \$22,500 pay for each member.

Others wanted to make sure the county executive does not have too much power. Currently, the executive would draft the county budget and the council members would not be able to add to it. They could only take items out of the budget.

Some took issue with the plan to require 10 percent of registered voters to sign a petition before it could go to referendum. Speakers said that was too high and should be lowered, but not to the point where everything goes to referendum.

Former County Commissioner Kai Hagen was worried about the plan for redistricting within the county, should the population change drastically.

"It's guaranteed gerrymandering," he said of the current proposal. "I strongly suggest it's guaranteed to be highly partisan."

Many offered support for the overall plan, saying a charter form of government would give the county a strong seat at the table in Annapolis.

"It's OK to compromise -- to reach the greater goal and get to where we need to be," Frederick resident Josh Bokee said.

Frederick resident Kyle Bostian said he has watched many of the meetings on television at home.

"This is a charter I can vote for and live with," Bostian said. "This is a charter I can encourage my neighbors to vote for."

Frederick resident David Rogers said a coalition is forming to spread the word about the charter once the final proposal is ready for the public.

Before it goes for a final vote in the November election, Rogers said there was a plan to create outreach documents to share with organizations around the county.

"I think it's going to be an interesting few months," Rogers said.

Charter Board members said they paid close attention to the public comments and took note of the trends.

Board member Rocky Mackintosh said the public comments "touched on every one of the issues that are still hot buttons."

Still, he was optimistic.

"I think we can all come to a resolution," Mackintosh said.

Chairman Ken Coffey said he didn't hear anything from the public that couldn't be addressed before the final version is presented to the Board of County Commissioners. There will be one more meeting in July, he said, which is when the Charter Board will iron out the issues raised Wednesday night and take a final vote.

"There are some things we can tweak to make it an even better charter," Coffey said after the meeting. "My sense is -- based on the feedback -- I think we'll make some substantive changes in several areas. I think we're very close."