

With charter government assured, county plans transition

Originally published November 08, 2012

By [Bethany Rodgers](#)
News-Post Staff

The morning after voters started Frederick County government down a two-year path to change, officials wasted no time hashing out a game plan.

A transition team is already forming as the clock starts ticking down to Dec. 1, 2014, the day the county's first executive and council members are to take charge. The Tuesday success of a county charter which unofficial election results show was approved by a margin of 62 to 38 percent triggered the shift away from the current government model, one headed by five commissioners.

Ragen Cherney, the commissioners' legislative coordinator, said a transition team, headed by the county manager, will take shape over the next few days to handle budgetary and logistical planning. The shift to charter should not cost taxpayers anything,--Cherney said, because the county already has computers, phones and space to spare for an executive and seven council members.--

A legal review will parallel the nuts-and-bolts preparations, Cherney said, as attorneys comb the county code and replace references to the board of commissioners.

Supporters of charter Wednesday celebrated a win that for some was years in the making.--

"I'm elated that it passed, and I think the county is going to be much better off for it. My only regret is that we didn't do it sooner," said Delegate Galen Clagett, who for more than four decades has pushed for charter in Frederick County.

While Clagett said he went into Election Day feeling confident that charter would prevail, he did not anticipate it would net such a decisive win.

The election outcome was not welcome to former County Commissioner Kai Hagen, who opposed the charter as written. He said the result was due in large part to a cash imbalance, with most of the campaign dollars being spent on the pro-charter side.

Hagen sees pitfalls in the fact that residents will elect the first executive and council before they have a chance to watch Frederick County's charter government in action. A concerted effort to inform voters about the new system is necessary before the 2014 election, he said.

"I hope there's an effort to educate people about the nature of this charter that is as assiduous as the effort to mislead them before it was passed," Hagen said.

Clagett said the charter form of government is already in place in many counties and all municipalities in the state, so it is not an unfamiliar concept, although additional education could be beneficial.

Frederick County officials will look to Cecil County for guidance on making the transition to charter, Cherney said.

Cecil County voters accepted charter in 2010 and on Tuesday elected their first executive and two council members. Over the past two years, the northeastern Maryland county has drafted council rules and worked out logistics, said Al Wein, county administrator. Wein said the county has made no new hires in preparation for the shift.

The recent charter wins in Cecil and Frederick counties could signal a trend, said Jeanne Bilanin, associate director for applied research and outreach for the University of Maryland's Institute for Governmental Service and Research.

Before 2002, when Dorchester County switched to charter government, no Maryland county had moved to charter since 1973. Tuesday's approval of a Frederick County charter might spur other jurisdictions to consider restructuring their governments, she said.

"I think that they're going to have a lot more confidence that there's a chance that the charters will pass because the voters will be looking at these recent victories in other communities," Bilanin said.

Copyright 1997-2012 Randall Family, LLC. Copyright Policy All rights reserved.

<http://www.fredericknewspost.com/sections/news/display.htm?StoryID=143106#.UKQbEld9KSq>