

# **Mt. Vernon, NY**

## ***Draft Charter Revision Process***

### **National Civic League**

#### **Overview**

We are proposing to assist Mt. Vernon, NY, with their City Charter revision process, providing assistance in the following areas:

- Guidance and orientation for the Charter Commission regarding City Charters and key provisions that result in effective, equitable governance;
- Research on communities of similar size to develop comparative analysis of charter governance provisions; and
- Working with the commission and city staff to design a community outreach plan that will result in options for Charter changes that are likely to garner community support.

League staff will meet with the Charter Commission in person three times and online two additional times during this process, which is expected to take a total of six months. The result of the League's assistance will be a set of recommendations for Charter changes and an outreach plan for a measure to be put in front of voters in 2025.

#### **Process Framework:**

The Mt. Vernon City Charter revision process will include two phases: a Pre-Charter Initiating Phase and the Outreach and Revision Process.

The Pre-Charter Initiating Phase I will focus on the process and logistics of the revision process and the training/orientation of the appointed Charter Commission. This will include information-gathering, research on key topics and design of a community outreach plan.

The Outreach and Revision Process Phase II will focus on community outreach and engagement, identification of key areas for consideration of revisions, and design of language for updating the Charter itself. Our thought here is that the outreach would be targeted to meet with the members of 5-10 community organizations, e.g., Chamber of Commerce, League of Women Voters, neighborhood associations, etc., since our experience is that open public meetings often fail to attract attendees.

#### **Pre-Charter Initiating Phase**

##### **Orientation and Commission Identification of Key Topics (July/Aug)**

Purpose: Prepare the Charter Commission for success on their charge.

- Orient Charter Commission members so that they understand their role and responsibilities, including assistance with the targeted outreach process.
- NCL will help Charter Commission members to learn:
  - o What a Charter is/isn't
  - o Role of Charter Commission
  - o How to run targeted outreach meetings
- Work with Commission to identify potential topics for Charter changes

### **Research and Feedback (Sep/Oct)**

For each proposed charter change addressed by the Commission, NCL will draw upon our 100+ years of experience in working with charters and developing models for cities and counties, research best practices among similar size cities and data on outcomes of different governance models to develop and present alternatives along with an evidence-based analysis of strengths and weaknesses.

Examples of areas in which the League has worked with other cities include:

- Elections of Council members by district vs. at-large
- Timing of city elections—November vs. other months
- Council-Manager systems vs. Mayor-Council structures
- Ways to reflect equity and engagement in city charters
- Options for addressing issues and structural priorities outside of inclusion of detailed matters in the charter
- Charter measures for accountability and effective governance

For these and other matters that may be of interest to the commission, the League will access past research and expert discussions, along with new research on cities of similar size and structure to present the commission with pros and cons of alternatives.

### **Outreach and Revision Process Phase II**

#### **Community Outreach Plan (Sep/Oct)**

Work with Charter Commission to refine outreach process and identify key Charter issue areas for consideration, and plan community meetings.

- Add, change, outreach target list for outreach.
- Design script and questions for community meetings regarding key Charter issue areas.

#### **Development of Draft Charter Revisions & Other Policy Recommendations (Jan/Feb)**

Based on input from community outreach sessions, NCL will work with city staff to help draft language for proposed Charter changes.

**Mt. Vernon City Charter Revision Project  
Draft Budget**

Note: This budget is subject to change (increase or decrease) based on the finalized process design.

**Staffing:** **\$ 21,500.00**

Staffing costs includes all digital tool work, preparation, onsite work, travel time, NCL team meetings, follow-up, and research/writing.

Doug Linkhart  
Matt Leighninger  
Derek Okubo

**Travel (3 trips total)** **\$ 3,300.00**

Travel costs includes airfare, hotel, ground transportation, airport parking, mileage, and meals.

**Total:** **\$24,500.00**