

PROCUREMENT JUSTIFICATION FOR CONTINUING TO ENGAGE THE NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE TO ASSIST THE 2024 MOUNT VERNON CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Mount Vernon Charter Review Commission (the 2024 Commission) seeks the continued expert assistance of the National Civic League (NCL) as it advances into the next critical phase of its mission—community engagement and report drafting. The NCL’s involvement will help ensure that any proposed revisions align with best practices, effectively address the needs of our diverse community, and thoughtfully incorporate survey data and public outreach efforts. With its extensive expertise and experience, NCL is uniquely positioned to support this important initiative.

Since this engagement is a continuation of a previously approved partnership, it remains exempt from the City’s Procurement RFP and bidding process as outlined in the “Ordinance Replacing Outdated Procurement Legislation and Adopting an Updated Procurement Policy for the City of Mount Vernon, New York,” dated April 24, 2024. The 2024 Commission submits this Justification Statement in support of that exemption request.

EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

As highlighted in New York State’s guide, *Revising City Charters in New York State*:

An effective public education program constitutes one of the most important aspects of a charter revision effort.

From its first meeting to its last, a charter commission should consider its relationship to the public whose ultimate judgment of the commission’s work will be expressed in the form of referendum votes Regardless of how it conceives its role, it is essential that the charter commission conduct a public education program. The earlier it is started, the greater the chances for generating and sustaining widespread interest in the community. Another benefit is to permit the charter commission to test public reaction to various viewpoints and proposals under consideration. In addition, it may be valuable in terms of developing public support for alternatives to the status quo to be proposed by the charter commission. Finally, the commission will want to prepare the voters to vote intelligently.

(emphasis added).

With a long-standing reputation for excellence in civic engagement, the NCL is uniquely positioned to assist the 2024 Commission in fulfilling this critical aspect of the charter

revision process. Established in 1894, the NCL has decades of experience helping municipalities across the United States strengthen their civic infrastructure. Its proven methodologies in facilitating charter revisions and community engagement make it an invaluable partner in this effort.

Notably, the NCL has played a pivotal role in developing the very guidance relied upon by charter revision commissions nationwide. Resources such as the Model City Charter, the Guide for Charter Commissions (which was provided to the 2024 Commission upon appointment), and the All-America Conversations Toolkit—a comprehensive “how-to” guide for effective public engagement—are all products of NCL’s expertise.

Furthermore, one of the proposals under consideration by the 2024 Commission is the wholesale adoption of the Model City Charter. Given that NCL is the drafter of this foundational document, its continued involvement is not just beneficial—it is essential.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

As the Commission moves into the next phase of its work, its engagement with the NCL remains vital. As part of this continuing engagement, the NCL will:

1. Arrange, conduct, and provide staffing for four community engagement/community conversations to occur at different locations around Mount Vernon. Two of the sessions will occur in April, and two will occur in May.
2. Design, facilitate, and manage the Commission’s follow-up survey, which will incorporate results from our opening survey. This information will be used to inform and engage the public at the outreach events.
3. Continue to provide research and other materials on issues, including any new or emerging issues, particularly those that arise as part of the community outreach/conversations.
4. Provide a final analysis, write-up, and presentation to ensure that the Commission’s proffered revisions and final report reflect community input.

COST AND VALUE

While the NCL’s services involve a financial investment, the value they bring to the charter revision process is substantial. Their expertise will help avoid costly mistakes and ensure the final charter is both effective and reflective of community needs. The investment in NCL’s services will likely result in long-term savings by creating a more efficient and responsive municipal governance structure.

The quote of \$29,000, which is attached, is in line with the scope of services being provided, which includes, but is not limited to, travel, outreach set up, coordination, and survey design and hosting.

REQUESTS FOR ESTIMATES

As previously noted, in seeking charter revision assistance, the 2024 Commission researched and/or reached out to four experts, with the following results:

1. The Benjamin Center – Anitra Hadley, a 2024 Commission member who also served on the 2019 Commission, so was familiar with the Benjamin Center, reached out to inquire about their assistance. She was informed that the Center no longer offers charter revision assistance because the person who spearheaded the effort has retired. Ms. Hadley still had the Benjamin Center’s 2019 quote and shared it with 2024 Commission Chairperson.
2. The National Civic League – Tamala Boyd, the 2024 Commission Chairperson reached out to the NCL and spoke with Doug Linkhart. After exchanging several emails about 2024 Commission needs, the NCL provided the quote that is the subject of this justification.
3. New York State Department of State Division of Local Government Service – Both Ms. Boyd and Ms. Hadley exchanged messages with the DOS. The DOS also puts out significant guidance for local governments, however, they do not offer the kind of substantive assistance required by the 2024 Commission.
4. Citizens Union – Ms. Boyd did significant research on the Citizens Union, and while the organization has a lot of experience with charter revision and the process, the focus is on New York City. As such, Ms. Boyd did not pursue a conversation with the Citizens Union.

The 2024 Commission could locate no other organization that could offer the same services in the same way, and that could match NCLs:

- *Extensive Experience*: Decades of experience specifically in charter revision and civic engagement.
- *Reputation*: A trusted name in civic improvement with numerous successful projects. They have literally “written the book” on the charter revision process.
- *Tailored Approach*: Customized strategies that address the unique needs of each community they serve. In fact, in preparation for our initial call, before he knew anything about the 2024 Commission, Mr. Linkhart research Mount Vernon so he could have an intelligent conversation about our needs.

Moreover, engaging the NCL is in line with the standards outlined in Mount Vernon’s updated procurement policy at section 6A, entitled: “Professional services or services requiring special or technical skill, training or expertise.” That section requires that chosen professionals be evaluated using the following criteria: accountability, reliability, responsibility, skill, education and training, judgment, integrity, and moral worth. As outline above and again below, the NCL more than meets these requirements.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. *Accountability*: the NCL has a long history of successful projects in municipal governance, demonstrating a high level of accountability. They consistently deliver on their commitments and provide transparent reporting throughout the project lifecycle. There is no better referral than the NCL's century plus of good work.
2. *Reliability*: the NCL is known for its consistent and reliable performance. Their established methodologies ensure timely and dependable delivery of services, which is crucial for the success of the charter revision process. The NCL has robust support systems and experienced staff to handle any issues that arise.
3. *Responsibility*: the NCL operates under ethical and inclusive standards that include engaging a wide range of stakeholders responsibly, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in the charter revision process.
4. *Skill*: the NCL team has extensive experience in civic governance, public administration, and legal frameworks, ensuring a comprehensive and expert approach to charter revision. The NCL excels in facilitating public meetings and workshops, skillfully managing diverse perspectives and fostering constructive dialogue.
5. *Education and Training*: The NCL team includes highly educated professionals with advanced degrees in relevant fields such as public administration, law, and political science.
6. *Judgment*: the NCL's extensive experience allows them to exercise sound judgment in all aspects of the charter revision process, from identifying areas for improvement to drafting revisions.
7. *Integrity*: the NCL is widely recognized for their integrity and trustworthiness. They conduct their work with honesty and transparency, building trust with all stakeholders involved in the charter revision process. For this reason, they remain in business more than a century after their founding.
8. *Moral Worth*: the NCL is a mission driven organization focused on promoting the public good, enhancing democratic governance, and improving civic engagement. Their work reflects a deep commitment to moral and ethical principles. The NCL prioritizes the needs and values of the community, which will ensure that the charter revisions serve the best interests of all residents of Mount Vernon.

Notably, while this procurement does not qualify as an emergency under the updated procurement policy, the 2024 Commission *is* operating within an extremely truncated time period of less than one year, when at least two years was contemplated by the Charter. As such, being required to go through a procurement process, the timing of which is uncertain, at best, would render the prospect of this engagement moot.

CONCLUSION

Based on the criteria of accountability, reliability, responsibility, skill, education and training, judgment, integrity, and moral worth, the NCL is exceptionally qualified to assist the 2024 Commission. Their proven expertise, ethical approach, and commitment to

community engagement make them the ideal partner for this critical project. Moreover, such an engagement is a prudent decision that will enhance the quality and effectiveness of the 2024 Commission's recommendations and thus, the quality and effectiveness of Mount Vernon's governance. Finally, the NCL's expertise will ensure a thorough, inclusive, and professionally managed revision process, ultimately leading to a charter that better serves the people of Mount Vernon.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the 2024 Commission proceed with procuring the services of the NCL to leverage their expertise and ensure the success of our charter revision efforts.