



Snohomish County Council

Office of Councilman Dave Somers
M/S 609
3000 Rockefeller Avenue
Everett, WA 98201

April 25, 2006

Snohomish County Charter Review Commission
3000 Rockefeller MS 410
Everett, WA 98201

Dear Commissioners,

It was a pleasure to be able to discuss with you the potential amendments to the Snohomish County Charter. I thank you again for your time and commitment to this process.

- **Public Involvement** – I support requirements for holding hearings for major Council actions during evening hours. We strive to do this now for issues we know are of broad interest to the public. This includes changes to the County Comprehensive Plan or policies, budget adoption, and major land use issues such as amendment of critical areas regulations. However, 90% plus of the issues dealt with by the Council are generally of low interest to the public, and to require normal business be conducted during evening hours would serve little public purpose. Even for major issues, such as adoption of the County Budget, it is not unusual to have only a handful of citizens attend our evening hearings.

Weekend meetings would not likely attract significant numbers of citizens. As already mentioned, most hearings are sparsely attended and it is my feeling that most citizens are much more likely to attend a weekday evening meeting.

The Charter should require equal and open access to County government, particularly in relation to the development of ordinances and policies. All interest groups and the public should have equal access.

I believe this action is possible under the existing Charter.

- Number of Council members – I do not support increasing the number of Council positions. The County Council is primarily a legislative body and our work load is not tied directly to population. In terms of improving representation of the citizens, increasing the number of Council members from 5 to 7 would change the ratio from 1 council member for every 70,000 voters to 1/50,000. I don't feel that that change would make a significant difference in either representation of the voters or the Councils workload. Also, the area of unincorporated county continues to decline as areas are annexed into cities. Finally increasing the size of the Council will result in significantly higher costs to the public for salaries, staffing, travel and benefits, and office space.
- Ombudsman – I support the creation of an Ombudsman office. Citizens, businesses and others often need unbiased and independent assistance with county issues. I believe this would best be established under the County Council, in a similar manner as the Hearing Examiners office. The Ombudsman would be independent from Council interference, much as the Hearing Examiner is now. I believe this action is possible under the existing Charter.
- Independent Elected Officials – I think the citizens are well served with independently elected officials. I believe there is more accountability with this system.
- Salary Commission – I support the establishment of an independent salary commission for elected officials, including the County Council. I believe the current Salary Commission structure is fine but that they should be given the authority to establish the salary rates for all of the elected positions in Snohomish County government.
- Appeals to Superior Court – I support an amendment to the Charter that would send all land use appeals directly to Superior Court, rather than through the County Council as is currently the practice. I feel the County Council is not well structured to provide an impartial and fair hearing to appellants. I believe this action is possible under the existing Charter.
- Creation of Office of Strategic Planning – As we discussed, I do not think it appropriate to move our current Long Range Planning Office into the County Council office. Long range planning of land use and economic development issues is a traditional and appropriate role for a planning department under the Executive. I do however believe it appropriate for the Council to create an Office of Strategic Planning to better position the County Council to fulfill it's responsibilities as the legislative body for the County. This office would cover the gamut of legislative issues in a comprehensive manner, including land use, economic development, public works, human services, criminal justice, etc. The

role of the office would be to craft a comprehensive legislative agenda in cooperation with the Executives office. I believe this action is possible under the existing Charter.

As I mentioned at our meeting, I would be happy to discuss any of these issues with you, or any other you are considering. I thank the Charter Review Commission for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Somers", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dave Somers
Snohomish County Council, District 5