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PRESS RELEASE

FROM: CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 23, 2003

Contact: Sonya E. Healy
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CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION SCHEDULES PUBLIC FORUM **DECEMBER 3, 2003 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

The Montgomery County Charter Review Commission will hold a public forum on Wednesday, December 3 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the 3rd Floor Conference Room at the Council Office Building in Rockville. The Commission is seeking comments from County residents about a variety of issues to determine if the current system of County Government adequately addresses the increased demographic and economic diversity of the County.

Specifically, the Commission would like community input on the following issues it proposes to study: (1) whether the size and structure of the County Council provides the appropriate level of representation; (2) whether County Council positions should be considered full-time jobs and compensated at a level commiserate with a full-time position; and (3) whether the State Constitution should be amended to increase the number of signatures required to petition a County Charter amendment.

Size and Structure of the Council

Currently, the Council is made up of nine Councilmembers, with five elected from geographic districts and four elected at-large. With more than 900,000 residents and an expanding minority population, the Charter Review Commission is studying the size and structure of the County Council to determine if adding Council seats or changing the ratio of district versus at-large seats would help promote increased political participation by diverse socio-economic groups. In addition, the Charter Review Commission is evaluating whether Councilmember positions should be considered full-time jobs with a comparable salary and limitations on outside employment.

Number of Signatures Required to Petition a County Charter Amendment

The Maryland Constitution, Article XI-A, Section 5, provides that amendments to county charters can be proposed, "by a petition signed by not less than 20 percent of registered voters of the . . . county, provided, however, that in any case 10,000 signatures shall be sufficient to complete a petition." This provision has been in effect since 1915. At that time, virtually every county in Maryland had fewer than

10,000 registered voters. Today, 10,000 signatures represent two percent of the County's registered voters, and this percentage will continue to decrease as the County's population grows.

Meanwhile, Charter Section 114, Referendum, requires signatures of five percent of registered voters to petition to referendum legislation enacted by the Council. The County has approximately 490,000 registered voters. Therefore, legislative petitions would require 24,500 signatures, while Charter petitions require only 10,000 signatures. As a result, it is significantly easier to petition to change the Charter than to alter Council adopted legislation.

Mission of the Charter Review Commission

The Charter is the constitutional framework for County Government. Charter Section 509 provides for an eleven-member, bi-partisan Charter Review Commission to study the Charter. The Charter Review Commission must report to the County Council in May 2004 with recommendations for possible Charter revisions. These recommendations may lead to proposed Charter amendments that are voted on by the electorate in November 2004. The current members of the Charter Review Commission are: Kenneth Muir, Chair, Barbara Smith Hawk, Vice Chair, Julie W. Davis, Mollie N. Habermeier, Cheryl C. Kagan, Michael W. McKeehan, Javier Miyares, Sylvia Brown Olivetti, Randy Scritchfield, Robert M. Skelton, and Shelton Skolnick.

Those wishing to present their opinions on the issues listed above or who are interested in recommending additional issues for the Charter Review Commission to study should sign up to speak by contacting Sonya Healy or Carol Edwards at 240-777-7929 or via e-mail at CharterReviewCommission@montgomerycountymd.gov no later than Tuesday, November 18. Written testimony may also be submitted via e-mail at the above address or mailed to the Charter Review Commission c/o Montgomery County Council, Stella Werner Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20850.

The Charter can be accessed on the web at: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/govtmpl.asp> or by calling 240-777-7900. Directions to the Council Office Building may also be obtained by calling this number.

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