

Green Statement on Urban Charter Commission Districts

Before I address the proposals of the Urban Charter Commissions, I would like to emphasize something. It is the intention and expressed desire of the Green Party of Bernalillo County to establish this city as a model of growth, cooperation, economic development and ecological wisdom within the historical mural of New Mexico's traditional social and cultural fabric.

In the context, of the new Urban Charter, as I have stated before, it represents an opportunity to establish more equitable power relationships and distribute responsibility in a more democratic way. Changing the Charter should mean reforming government and improving representation. And there is no more opportune time than the present to do that.

Now, to the question of the District plans. I would beg the Commission's indulgence for a brief overview of the concerns and perspectives of Greens in Bernalillo County.

1. Language is needed in the Charter to provide Instant Run-Off Voting, and/or majority vote runoff in mayoral elections and Greens will support such a proposal.
2. Proportional representation and increasing the number of districts per constituency are reforms needed to enable improved access and input by average residents. We are skeptical of at-large representatives concerned as we are about accountability and defined districts.
3. Campaign Finance Reform must not diminish prior standards and seek to improve the ability of average citizens to run for public office through public financing and should be considered within the Charter language.
4. An ombudsman to represent citizen complaints against public officials should be included in the Charter.
5. An ethics committee with independent standing to review and refer actions for legal action against corrupt public officials is another feature that could be addressed within the Charter.
6. A police oversight committee with the power to remove those officers who abuse their authority does not exist today and needs to be remedied. An appointed advocate for the river and the ecosystem it is clearly warranted. These are issues that could also be incorporated into the Charter language.
7. Goal K of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly states as a goal for its 50-year water plan: "Balance growth with renewable supply (of water)." Such an objective can be consistently applied by all governmental structures in the region and remains a cornerstone for policy making in the years ahead.
8. Land use necessarily needs to be consistent and defined for policies to be implemented over a long period of time. Our concern lies with maintaining and supporting the existing rural residents and not in the economic exploitation of the outlying areas. They have repeatedly made their sentiments known in this regard and should be taken at their word within the context of Charter language.

I would like to thank Mr. Roth for getting the information from Research and Polling regarding voter registration in the proposed Plans. As a political party the Green Party is here to represent our constituents in the most thorough and effective means available. In considering the plans we ask only two things: 1) Do the plans reflect an equitable distribution of registered Greens in a way in which their impact can be felt in elections and their interests can be expressed to public officials with a significant representation of support in the Districts? 2) Do the plans ensure and protect the rights of representation of people of color?

In regard to the first question: we must confess that Plans B, B-1, B-2 are the most constructive proposals that would enable Greens to function within the political arena. We would prefer much smaller districts and see no reason why this cannot be implemented now, rather than waiting after a charter is approved. Currently the ratio of 50,000 residents to every Commissioner is unnecessarily high.

We are concerned in regards to the district represented by the Federation of University Neighborhoods continues to be dissected in such a way as to deny the community there representation. The area I speak of is made up roughly of the area bordered by Indian School on the North, Gibson on the South, Carlisle on the east and Broadway on the West. We have noted in the City Council's redistricting proposals our concerns about a lack of representation for that distinct community within Albuquerque. We would like to see a review of a plan that provides a district for voters there.

Regarding question 2: We would prefer 13-15 representatives to maximize local representation, and diminish the influence of special interests in decision-making. This would not only improve services to constituents locally, but it would guarantee grass roots representation of people of color on a much more significant level.

We do not presume to speak for the community at-large or residents within the various areas of the city. It is entirely consistent with the purpose of government that all residents be accorded representatives capable of expressing their concerns and interests. We do speak as a political party dedicated to the proposition of one person-one vote. We speak as a party that defends the articulated historical rights of traditional acequias and land grant communities. We speak as a party opposed to partisan efforts to disenfranchise Greens, or any other parties, whether through gerrymandering or arbitrary administrative and statutory restrictions.

Further, rural Greens have expressed much concern about the impact of the Charter change regarding housing construction and commercial development that will be facilitated by a subsidized infrastructure. No representation plan will gain the support of Greens if it fails to accept the maintenance of rural communities' lifestyle.

I thank the Commission for this opportunity to speak before it.

Martin Zehr Bernalillo County Green Party