HONOLULU CHARTER COMMISSION
1956 - 1958

Since the creation of the city and county of Honolulu in 1907, the city charter was amended by numerous acts of the legislature and the charter revision commission of 1937 - 1938. The restriction and interference by the legislature, rapid growth of the municipal and suburban areas leading to increasing complexity in local government, and a desire to keep tax revenue in Honolulu led to a sentiment favoring home rule. Bills to form a charter commission were introduced in both houses of the legislature in 1951, but were subsequently defeated.

The Twentieth-sixth Legislature in 1955 enacted Act 225, which authorized the Mayor of Honolulu to appoint a charter commission of nine members. The commission was charged with the task of formulating a charter for the city and county of Honolulu "adapted to the requirements of such city and county and designed to provide for the people of such city and county a more efficient, economical, and representative form of government." Act 225 further stipulated that the commission be required to submit the proposed charter to the Board of Supervisors, who could propose alternative provisions. At the next general election the proposed charter would be approved or disapproved by the electorate. Upon approval of the proposed charter, the County Clerk was to submit the proposed charter to the Secretary of the Territory, who would submit it to the legislature for ratification. Act 225, however, prohibited the commission from altering the status of the Board of Water Supply.

Mayor Neal S. Blaisdell appointed J. Ballard Atherton, president of the Hawaiian Telephone Company, as chairman of the Honolulu Charter Commission; other commissioners were Thomas D. Murphy, Suyeki Okamura, Allan J. McGuire, Raymond Y. C. Ho, Robert G. Dodge, Mrs. Eureka Forbes, William F. Quinn, and A. S. Reile. Later, C. Nils Tavares was appointed to replace William F. Quinn. The commission hired Charlton F. Chute of the Institute of Public Administration as a consultant and Nils K. Ueki as executive secretary.

Act 225 was amended by Act 277 in the 1957 session of the legislature to enable the city and county to submit the charter to the electorate for approval at a special election. It also allowed the commission to prescribe the form of ballot for the election and deleted the reservation held by the legislature on the Board of Water Supply.

The commissioners held 142 meetings over a period of twenty-eight months, sixteen of which were designated as public hearings. They listened to testimony by officials of the city and county, other public officials in Hawaii, members of civic organizations, interested individuals, and visiting personnel who were cognizant in municipal affairs. The commission prepared six drafts of the proposed charter. The fourth draft, the preliminary draft, was printed and widely circulated for comments to authorities on municipal government and to interested local individuals. It also served as a basis for a series of public hearings.
Honolulu Charter Commission

On the advice of consultants who recommended an educational campaign lest the charter be defeated at the polls, the commission worked with the Citizens' Charter Committee. Organized in July, 1956 and headed by Joe C. Harper, the committee sought to inform the public about the issues involved in the formulation of and to stimulate interest in the proposed charter. While the Citizens' Charter Committee functioned concurrently with the Charter Commission, the Citizens' Charter Forum, composed of prominent members of the community, was organized in April, 1958 to aid in the drive for approval of the proposed charter at the polls.

On April 3, 1958 the proposed charter for the city and county of Honolulu was submitted to the Board of Supervisors for examination and proposed alternatives. The proposed charter, as originally submitted by the commission, was approved by the electorate at the special election held on June 14, 1958, whence the terms of office of the commissioners expired. The proposed charter was then submitted to the Secretary of the Territory by the County Clerk on July 11, 1958, who submitted it to the legislature on March 6, 1959. With a few amendments, it was passed as Act 261. The bill was signed by Governor William F. Quinn on June 5, 1959, and the charter took effect on July 1, 1959.

The records may be divided into two groups, the regular files of the commission and those of J. Ballard Atherton, chairman. The former files include the drafts of the proposed charter, general correspondence, and communications with departments of the city and county; the latter files contain some duplicates of the former, but consist primarily of material and correspondence used in the campaigns for approval and ratification. The latter files also include some materials dealing with Honolulu's candidacy in the All-America City contest.

Commission files:

Box numbers
C&C1-1

Charter, City and County of Honolulu
Proposed Charter of the City and County of Honolulu as approved at the special charter election on June 14, 1958
Proposed Charter of the City and County of Honolulu and Proposed Alternatives
Signed copy of proposed charter
Copies of letters of transmittal to the Board of Supervisors, Mayor, Clerk
Minutes
Summary of discussions, meetings 1 - 48
Minutes of public hearings
Memoranda to commissioners
Copies of drafts of acts providing for charter commission
First draft of the proposed charter
Second draft of the proposed charter
Third draft of the proposed charter
Fourth draft of the proposed charter
Comments on the fourth draft
Digest and summary comments on the fourth draft
Fifth draft of the proposed charter
Sixth draft of the proposed charter
Model charter by National Municipal League

Outline for discussion: Factors Affecting City Government Structure
Questionnaire - Guiding Principles for Development of New Charter
Proposals for public improvement and improvement bonds
Papers relating to policy determination and proposed drafts of bills
Papers re form of government and incorporation
Papers on special committee on centralized purchasing
Papers relating to suburban water system
Organization charts
Papers re metropolitan government in Tennessee
Newspaper clippings re city reorganization (Seattle Times)
General Correspondence
Correspondence with Mayor and Board of Supervisors
Correspondence with Charlton Chute, consultant
Correspondence with mainland consultants
Correspondence with community and service organizations
Copies of letters to legislators re special election
Miscellaneous papers on the operation of the commission
Miscellaneous papers on the preliminary draft
Promotional materials on charter
Program materials for radio and TV
Bibliographies
Employee data
Affidavits for publications
Miscellaneous
Papers re city departments (alphabetical)

Chairman's file:

Memorandums to commission members from executive secretary: Act 225
Newspaper clippings (3 folders)
Bills introduced in the legislature on the charter issue
Third draft (annotated)
Items for reconsideration
Communications and statements re fourth draft
Endorsements of charter - 1958
Papers re discussions of public opinion survey, transition policies, and third draft
Alternatives proposed by Board of Supervisors
Ballot forms
Charter election results
Reference material for speeches
Miscellaneous memorandums, comments, summaries
Correspondence list
Miscellaneous correspondence (3 folders)
Correspondence with legislators re charter ratification
Correspondence with Arthur G. Smith, Chamber of Commerce
Correspondence re ratification of proposed charter
Citizens' Charter Committee - Newsletters
Citizens' Charter Committee - miscellaneous papers
Citizens' Charter Forum - miscellaneous papers
Newspaper clippings re charter ratification
Miscellaneous papers on charter ratification
Miscellaneous papers on charter ratification and All-America City entry
Miscellaneous references (3 folders)

See also: Subject Index: City and County Charter

Governor's file: William F. Quinn
Honolulu
Charter Commission
Charter, Distribution of, State Agencies