

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.

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

C&C1-2

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)

C&C1-3 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)

- C&C1-4
- 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