

University of Iowa News Release

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Iowa City residents support some proposed Charter revisions, would support additional changes as well

With the Iowa City Council considering the proposed revisions to the city's Home Rule Charter made by the Charter Review Commission, local citizens support many of the revisions being considered by the City Council. They also support some that were not among the final recommendations made by the commission, but that the City Council may discuss at a future meeting.

A University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll conducted 03/23/15-03/29/15 of 657 residents of Johnson County asked the 363 respondents who indicated they live in Iowa City to weigh in on some of the proposed changes. 61 percent of respondents agree with the proposal to allow any eligible voter to sign initiative petitions while 31.8 percent preferred the current rules, which limits signatures to registered voters. Respondents prefer to keep the current number of required signatures, about 2500, over the proposal to raise it to about 3600 by over a two to one margin, with 63.7 percent preferring the lower threshold and 26.7 percent the larger threshold.

Support for the extension to allow any eligible voter to sign initiative petitions rather than just registered voters was divided by age. 67 percent of respondents between 18 and 34-years old and 64.4 percent of respondents between 35–54 support the revision compared to 45.3 percent of those between 55 and 69-years old and 40.9 percent of those 70 and over who support the revisions. Support was strongest among self-proclaimed Independents at 74.8 percent and Democrats at 60.3 percent compared to Republicans, among which only 19.8 percent supported the change.

Respondents also offered strong support for a proposed revision to the charter regarding selection of the mayor. This proposal was discussed at early Charter Review Commission meetings, but was not part of the Commission's final recommendations. 63.3 percent of respondents indicated a preference for direct election of the mayor as opposed to the 30.0 percent who reported a preference for the current system, in which council members select the mayor from among their ranks. Support for direct election was greatest among younger respondents, with 66.9 and 64.0 percent of those between 18–34 and 35–54-years old, respectively, preferring the direct election, compared to 56.4 and 51.1 percent among those aged 66–69-years old and 70 and over. A sharp gender divide also emerged, with 55.4 percent of male respondents preferring direct election compared to 72.5 percent of female respondents.

Respondents were also asked what system they preferred for selecting city council members. 26.8 percent preferred electing each of the seven members from separate districts, 28.9 percent indicated a preference for all members being elected at-large by all voters, whereas the plurality, 35.0 percent, preferred the current system, which combines aspects of both the at-large and separate districts options.

Fred Boehmke, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Iowa Social Science Research Center, commented that “these results indicate that people in Iowa City support reforms that could encourage greater participation and involvement in elections and the government process, particularly in terms of increased access to the city’s initiative process. There also appears to be broad support for some changes that go beyond those proposed by the Charter Review Commission.”

Background: The Hawkeye Poll was conducted March 23-29, 2015 by the Hawkeye Poll. The poll was conducted by the Hawkeye Poll Cooperative, comprised of UI faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students in political science, with the cooperation and facilities of the Iowa Social Science Research Center, directed by UI Political Science Professor Frederick J. Boehmke. The faculty adviser for the poll is UI Professor of Political Science Frederick J. Boehmke. The poll is a teaching, research and service project of the UI Department of Political Science. The Department of Political Science, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Office of the Provost fund the poll.

Respondent identification: A random sample was acquired with 50 percent household landline numbers and 50 percent mobile phone numbers. For households, an initial attempt was made on answering the phone to reach the “youngest male who is 18 years or older.” All who stated they were over age 18 and willing to participate in the survey were included.

Sample: The survey consisted of 657 Johnson County, Iowa residents, of which 363 respondents lived in Iowa City; the margin of error for the Iowa City sample is +/- 5.2 percent. Among these Iowa City respondents, 56.21 percent were Democrat, 11.58 percent Republican and 28.25 percent Independent. 36.76 percent considered themselves moderate, while 49.7 percent self-identified as liberal and 13.53 percent as conservative.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by sex and age.

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