Committee Member Leaves as Final Home Rule Charter Drafted

by K_Guice

The Deschutes County Home Rule Charter Committee met Tuesday, July 18 to draft the language of the proposed Home Rule Charter.

One member was not there, Leland Smith. The Wednesday prior he gave his resignation citing his concerns and disappointments.

The letter read, â€œNow that all of the major decisions on the structure of the Home Rule Charter have been made, I have decided to resign from the committee so that Jim Carnahan can be re-appointed as a voting member and can vote for the final charter adoption.â€•

However, Smith says he did not resign in protest. â€œAll of the decisions were voted on and passed by the committee and the final two meetings were to write final language of the charter,â€• he said.

Smith said he doesnâ€™t like to withdraw from things that he is involved in, but at this stage he didnâ€™t see any reason to continue. â€œI run a business, so I donâ€™t have time to help write language for a charter I didnâ€™t support,â€• he said.

Committee member and Redmond Police Chief, Lane Roberts said he did not want to see Smith go. â€œI think we have lost a valuable member of the committee,â€• he said. â€œI think that one of the strengths of the group is while none of us all agree on any one issue we all bring a different perspective.â€•

Smith said his perspective seemed to be in direct opposition of everything that was passed and to be included in the proposed Home Rule Charter.

Home Rule Charter Includes the Following Measures:

Â· The county commissioner count would increase from three to five.

Â· Commissioners would work part-time hours and their salary would potentially be $30,000 per year plus benefits.

Â· The board of county commissionersâ€™ duties would be limited to policy-making decisions. The county administrator would be responsible and have the authority to manage the staff and daily operations. The board would appoint the administrator. And the administrator would serve at the pleasure of the board.

Â· The sheriff and county clerk would remain as elected positions, while the county treasurer and assessor would be appointed. The county surveyor would remain an appointed position.

Â· Five county commissioners' districts would be established.

Â· County commissioner positions would be nonpartisan.

It is the last two measures that Smith most strongly disagrees with. â€œOne of the big issues is partisan versus nonpartisan,â€• he said. â€œWhat happens when you get an entrenched incumbent?â€• he asked. â€œI am not a huge fan of partisan politics, but I like the idea of someone always running against the other candidate so I have a choice.â€•

Smithâ€™s biggest issue with the charter is that it would create districts for the commissioners. â€œThe idea that we canâ€™t vote for all of the commissioners, means only one commissioner would be accountable,â€• he explained.

â€œThe only recourse we have if we donâ€™t like what they are doing is the ballot box,â€• Smith said. â€œIf we vote for them all, then we have a pretty strong recourse, but if we only vote for one out of five we lose a lot of our representation.â€•

â€œWe provided special language to try and address that,â€• Roberts said. â€œDistricting doesnâ€™t give anyone a stronger voice than the other. Every commissioner is accessible and responsible to everyone.â€•

He added that the idea of the charter is to create a situation that runs more like a corporation where there is a CEO and a board. â€œThis is not a comment on the quality of our current commissioners; it is a comment on the current government structure.

â€œI have yet to see what is really so broken that we have to fix,â€• Smith said. â€œIâ€™ve lived here over 18 years and I feel a strong connection to the area and I want to do what is right by it,â€• he added.

Smith says he is not going to lead the charge. â€œAt the same time, I am going to let people know my views and my views are in opposition of the charter that is going to come out.â€•

The committee will meet again on July 25 and August 1 to complete the charterâ€™s language. If it is finalized in time, the Home Rule Charter will be on the November ballot.

â€œEven though we have completed this work there is no guarantee that the people will pass it,â€• Roberts said. â€œHowever, I think people in Deschutes County will be better served if they have a stronger voice in determining their destiny and I donâ€™t know what is more important about politics in this country than that.â€•

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