

# City of Battle Creek

## Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee

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**Date:** July 3, 2018  
**To:** Battle Creek City Commission  
**From:** Dr. Joe Schwarz, Chairperson  
**Subject:** Final Report and Recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee

By Resolution 58, the Battle Creek City Commission created the 2018 Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee on January 2, 2018. The Committee consists of 18 members, two members selected by each of the nine City Commissioners. The Committee shall consider potential charter amendments and make recommendations to the City Commission, while including citizen involvement.

At the February 7, 2018 Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee organizational meeting, committee members nominated Dr. Joe Schwarz as Committee Chairperson and Terry Burleson as Committee Vice Chairperson.

The scope of inquiry to be undertaken by the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee shall be focused on the examination, discussion and recommendations, which have been determined by City Administration prompted by workshop discussions, which are as follows:

1. Selection of Mayor and Vice Mayor
2. Changing the size of the commission
3. Staggering commission terms
4. Length of commission terms
5. Gendered charter language
6. Such other issues the committee deems appropriate and relevant to the issues assigned by the City Commission

To assist the Committee in their charge, City staff, including City Manager Rebecca Fleury, City Attorney Jill Steele and City Clerk Victoria Houser, provided the Committee members historical data related to the City's charter and ordinances, comparable municipal data, elected officials' term information, and ward redistricting examples. The Committee members were provided data related to the first four above items for 163 Michigan municipalities. Members were also provided a narrowed subset of that data focused on 20 municipalities with a population ranging from 41,863 to 84,094, to provide a better comparison to Battle Creek, whose population for the data comparison is set at 52,296. That data showed the following:

**Type of Government:**

Council-Manager: 14    Mayor-Council: 6

**Size of Council:**

Five Members: 2 municipalities    Seven Members: 16 municipalities    Nine Members: 2 municipalities

## Selection of Mayor:

Mayor elected by Council Members: 4 municipalities    Mayor elected by voters: 16 municipalities

The Committee also reviewed and considered current results of the City of Battle Creek Charter Public survey, noting the survey was initially released at the beginning of May both on-line and in utility bills. The current results reflect survey responses through June 27, 2018.

## Committee Deliberations

The Committee diligently engaged in a deliberate discussion of each consideration with which they were charged.

### **1. Selection of Mayor and Vice Mayor**

On June 27, 2018, Committee members, although not unanimous, with a vote of 12 Yes and 4 No, supported a motion that the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee recommends the city commission to consider the direct election of the mayor and vice mayor, leaving the method of election to the commission. Committee members expressed a preference that the mayor and vice mayor be determined with the top vote recipient as mayor and the second top vote recipient as the vice mayor, instead of separate ballot items for mayor and vice mayor. Comments by individual Committee members who support making this recommendation included:

- a. There is a constant part of the nation's citizens who do not believe or support government, thus allowing the voters to select the Mayor and Vice Mayor would help to provide the transparency to address this concern.
- b. Allowing the voters to select the Mayor and Vice Mayor would better promote inclusion.
- c. In recent years, voters have become more aware of hidden forces that impact politics and our community, such as systemic racism and direct election would help to address that concern.
- d. Allowing the city commission to select the Mayor and Vice Mayor can create animosity among commissioners.
- e. The Mayor assigns the committee membership, which is an important consideration. Allowing voters to select the Mayor would provide more community input on committee membership.
- f. It is important to have a strong executive on the City Commission instead of it just being a legislative body. If the voters elect an individual Mayor, it will help to create a strong executive on the City Commission.

### **2. Changing the Size of the Commission**

On June 27, 2018, Committee members agreed to stay with 9 Commissioners, with a vote of 14 Yes and 2 No, reaffirming the May 16, 2018 motion the Committee recommended a change from 5 Ward Commissioners and 4 At-Large Commissioners to 7 Ward Commissioners and 2 At-Large Commissioner, to be Mayor and Vice Mayor. Comments by individual Committee members who support making this recommendation included:

- a. There should be two at-large members of the Commission, and they should be the Mayor and Vice Mayor. The remaining commission members should represent the Wards.
- b. Having 7 Ward commissioners would allow the wards to be drawn to be more representative of neighborhoods.

### **3. Length of Commission Terms and Staggered Terms**

On June 27, 2018, with a unanimous vote, the Committee agreed Commission terms should remain at 2 years, non-staggered, with elections held bi-annually. Comments by individual Committee members who support making this recommendation included:

- a. 2-year terms work best and that eliminates the need to stagger terms.
- b. If voters are unhappy with their elected commissioner(s), then they shouldn't have to wait 4 years for an election to possibly replace them.
- c. Some in favor of staggering indicate it is to avoid the possibility of a complete turnover of the City Commission; however, others replied that if that happened, it would be the will of the people.

**4. Gendered Charter Language**

On June 27, 2018, the Committee unanimously reaffirmed the March 7, 2018 motion to recommend revisions to the City Charter using Ungendered Charter Language. Comments by Committee members who support making this recommendation included:

- a. The time has come to make this change.
- b. Making this change will promote inclusivity.

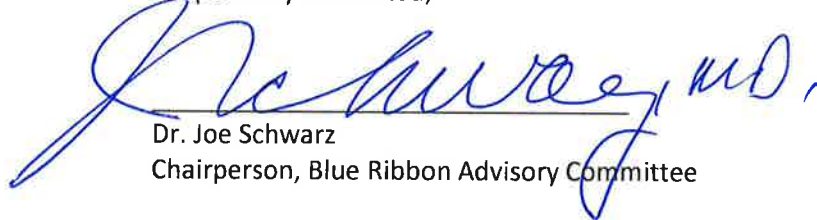
**5. Other Issues the Committee deems Appropriate and Relevant**

As to other issues the Committee deems appropriate and relevant, Commission term limits was briefly discussed at the May 16, 2018 and June 27, 2018 meeting. Committee members, without taking a vote, determined term limits would be placed by electors when expressing their vote at the elections.

The Committee took the above votes in order to provide recommendations, requesting the Commission consider each item, which was the result of careful consideration and spirited debate. The committee members look forward to continued citizen input and recommendations.

The Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee would like to commend the City Commission's willingness to consider changes to the City of Battle Creek Charter.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Joe Schwarz  
Chairperson, Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee