

BOROUGH OF CARLISLE

CHARTER ADVISORY COMMISSION

Report Including Recommendation

Thursday, June 28, 1990

The Charter Advisory Commission was established in January and assigned the task to advise Council whether or not the following question should be considered by the electorate:

Shall a government study commission of (seven, nine, or eleven) members be elected to study the existing form of government of the municipality; to consider the advisability of the adoption of an optional form of government or a home rule charter; to recommend the adoption of an optional form of government; or to draft and recommend a home rule charter?

The Charter Advisory Commission met on Thursday evening, February 1, to organize and plan a course of action to address this assignment. Subsequent meetings were held on Thursday evenings, April 5, May 31, Wednesday evening, June 13, and Thursday evening, June 28. Minutes of these minutes are on file in the Borough office.

The April and May meetings were well publicized and featured explanations and testimony from state government officials and leaders from other municipalities. These sessions enabled the Advisory Commission members to have an informed discussion at its meeting on Wednesday evening, June 13th.

That evening the Commission voted to recommend that Council hold a referendum to form a government study commission on the home rule issue. The roll call vote was 3-2 with Messrs. Adams, Coolidge, and Seavers voting aye; and Mr. Miller and Ms. George voting nay.

All members of the Advisory Commission agree that Borough government in Carlisle has been functioning in an excellent manner for many years, and this is especially true today. This unanimous view is a high compliment to the members of Borough Council, the Mayor, and the management team as well as the employees of our municipality.

It is the majority position that Borough Council should give the citizens of Carlisle the opportunity to decide whether or not home rule is appropriate for this municipality. The majority position is supported for the following reasons:

1. Carlisle Borough is a dynamic municipality. A home rule charter which would allow local government to do anything except that which is

- expressly prohibited by the state would, in turn, provide Carlisle with increased flexibility and creativity in local planning and government.
2. A home rule charter would increase the opportunity for citizen participation.
 3. A home rule charter could formalize the current Council-Manager form of government and, at the same time, provide for any change in organizational structure deemed to be advisable.
 4. A home rule charter could do away with the out-dated Civil Service system.
 5. In summary, home rule means shifting of responsibility for local government from the state legislature to the local community.

The minority position contends that Carlisle Borough government is functioning very well. For this reason and a number of additional reasons, these members of the Advisory Commission oppose placing the issue before the electorate. The reasons are as follows:

1. There is not compelling information available to justify the effort, time, and cost that would be required to bring about the proposed change. It could take a three- to five-year period.
2. It would divert Borough staff from present duties and cost up to \$20,000, depending on the consultative and support personnel employed to assist the government study commission.
3. It is suggested that an alternative approach be considered by Borough Council; namely, an internal study organized and administered by Council members and management staff which would identify and address problems and weaknesses in the current structure and operation. This approach would involve and test the integrity and productivity of all individuals associated with the enterprise.

All members join in expressing these concerns if the recommendation of the Charter Advisory Commission is adopted by Borough Council:

1. A well-organized and concerted public information campaign would be necessary, beginning at an early date and continuing through the functioning of the study commission.
2. Special attention must be given to the potential perception that an increase in taxes will occur if home rule is adopted.
3. Council should take steps to encourage well-qualified candidates to file to serve on the study commission.
4. Council members should not file to serve on the study commission.

187

The members of the Charter Advisory Commission are filing this report and recommendation so that Borough Council will have time to discuss and decide on placing the issue before the citizens at an election in November.

Gilmore B. Seavers, Chairman
Robert A. Adams
Thomas E. Coolidge
Nancy George
Pierson K. Miller