



2024 ORANGE COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION (CRC)

Governmental Structure Committee

Expansion of County Commission Final Report and Recommendation to the Charter Review Commission

March 1, 2024

Committee Members:

Angel de la Portilla, Chair
Mark Arias
Tom Callan
Chuck O'Neal
Cornita Riley
Eugene Stoccardo
Beverly Winesburgh
Dotti Wynn

Summary of Recommendation

At its May 15, 2023 meeting, the 2024 Orange County Charter Review Commission ("CRC") created the Expansion of County Commission Committee (now titled the Governmental Structure Committee due to its expanded scope) (the "Committee") to study proposals relating to expanding the membership of the Orange County Commission.

Over the past 10 months, the Committee has held 13 public meetings to hear public input and discuss such proposals. The Committee reviewed the work of similarly-tasked committees of the 2012, 2016, and 2020 CRC, historical population information, anticipated population growth, and population distribution among incorporated areas (within municipalities) and unincorporated areas. The Committee heard presentations from County staff concerning recent space studies looking at reorganizing County office space usage. The Committee also spoke with multiple current County Commissioners, as well as County Mayor Demings, former County Mayor Linda Chapin, and former County Mayor Teresa Jacobs. In the course of its work, the Committee considered options of adding either one or two additional single-member districts, as well as the option of maintaining the status quo.

After consideration of the information presented, the Committee voted 8-0¹ to recommend to the full CRC an amendment to the Orange County Charter

¹ The vote at the February 7, 2024 Committee meeting was 8-0 in favor of the recommendation. CRC Member Wynn later advised at the Committee's March 1, 2024 Committee meeting that she intended to vote against the recommendation, ultimately resulting in a 7-1 split of the Committee in support of the proposal.

increasing the number of County Commission districts from six single-member districts to eight single-member districts, resulting in a nine-member County Commission (eight Commissioners plus County Mayor) effective for the 2026 General Election.

The specifics of the proposal provide that the County Commission would redistrict the county into eight commission districts no later than November 1, 2025, to be effective for the 2026 general election. The redistricting plan would designate one of the two new commission districts to have an initial two-year term to maintain staggered elections. The proposal also ensures that term limits on sitting County Commissioners would continue to apply upon the transition to eight districts.

The proposed ballot and charter language is attached as Exhibit “A”.

Reasons for Recommendation

Explosive Growth in Orange County Population Since 1988

First and foremost, Orange County has more than doubled in population (from roughly 621,000 to approximately 1,500,000) since 1988, when a prior CRC successfully proposed a charter amendment expanding the County Commission from 5 at-large members to 6 commissioners elected in single-member districts plus a countywide Chairman. As a result, the representativeness and responsiveness adopted by the voters in their prior expansion of the County Commission has been eroded by this explosive population growth. When the current structure of the County Commission was approved by the voters in 1988, the average population of each district was roughly 104,000. That average population has grown to roughly 250,000 per district.

Expanding the number of commissioners and county commission districts from six to eight would reduce the average per district population to roughly 187,000.

A majority of the workgroup found that the proposed decrease of population per district would enable members of the County Commission to be more responsive and representative of their districts.

“Infrastructure” for Future Population Growth

In a related vein, the Committee also noted that the population of Orange County is projected to continue to increase at an extraordinary rate. The Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida has projected that Orange County’s population could increase to over 1,800,000 by 2030 (300,000/district with 6 districts, 225,000/district with 8 districts), and to nearly 2,000,000 by 2035 (333,333/district with 6 districts, 250,000/district with 8 districts). As a result, an expansion of the County Commission not only addresses the population growth that has occurred to date, but anticipates the needs of the county with regard to future growth.

Relatively Small Costs are Justified to Enhance Representation

The Committee reviewed information relating to the one-time and annual costs associated with adding two additional commissioners to the County Commission, including both historical Comptroller analyses of similar proposals and recently updated information. While the costs are not trivial, they are exceedingly small in the context of a county budget of over \$6.7 billion annually. Moreover, the relatively small costs are outweighed by the enhancement of representation for the citizens of the County.

The Supervisor of Elections provided the Committee with an estimate of a one-time cost of \$594,000 for that office to implement the new districts. Budgeted costs for the 2021 redistricting process amounted to roughly \$100,000, although that amount does not include staff time². In addition, County staff provided an estimated one-time capital cost of approximately \$1.7 million to modify current space to accommodate two additional commissioners and their staff, including remodels of portions of the 1st and 5th floors of the County Administration Building. These amounts total to an estimated one-time cost of roughly \$2.4 million, or roughly 0.036% of the \$6.7 billion FY 2024 Orange County budget. The Committee also received information indicating an estimated annual recurring cost of personal services and operating expenses (including the \$75,000 Public Works allocation per commissioner) for two additional commissioners at roughly \$1.2 million, or 0.018% of the \$6.7 billion FY 2024 Orange County budget.

Representative government costs money. Presumably money could be saved by eliminating most of the elected county commission seats and districts, but at an unacceptably heavy cost to the representativeness and responsiveness of the County Commission. Accordingly, the Committee believed that achieving enhanced representativeness and responsiveness was worth the relatively small incremental cost.

² A financial impact statement will ultimately be prepared by the Comptroller at the request of the full CRC, pursuant to a policy instituted by the Comptroller's office. All of the financial figures stated in this paragraph are provided to convey a general understanding of the scale of the costs.

Exhibit “A”

Ballot Proposal: The ballot title and ballot summary for this question are as follows:

**ORANGE COUNTY CHARTER
AMENDMENT INCREASING NUMBER OF
COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICTS**

Amending the Orange County Charter to increase the number of County Commission districts from six single-member districts to eight single-member districts, resulting in a nine-member County Commission (eight Commissioners plus County Mayor) effective for the 2026 General Election, while ensuring that term limits on sitting County Commissioners continue to apply upon the transition to eight districts.

_____ Yes
_____ No

Text Revisions: Upon approval of this question at referendum, the following portions of the Orange County Charter are amended to read as follows:

Sec. 202. Commission districts.

- A. Effective for the 2026 general election and thereafter, there shall be eight commission districts of contiguous territory as nearly equal in population as practicable. Prior to the commencement of the term of office for the commissioners elected at the 2026 general election, there ~~There~~ shall be six commission districts of contiguous territory as nearly equal in population as practicable. The districts shall be reconsidered after each decennial census and adjusted by the board after one or more public hearings.

- B. No later than November 1, 2025, the board shall adopt a redistricting plan redistricting the county into eight commission districts of contiguous territory as nearly equal in population as practicable, to be effective for the 2026 general election and thereafter. Commissioners in office upon the redistricting plan becoming effective shall continue in office until the normal expiration of their terms. The redistricting plan shall designate a commission district that will be subject to an initial abbreviated term of 2 years to maintain staggered elections as provided in Section 204.A.

Sec. 203. Structure of board.

Effective for the 2026 general election and thereafter, the number of commissioners shall be eight, with each member elected from single member districts and a county

mayor elected county-wide. Prior to the commencement of the term of office for the commissioners elected at the 2026 general election, the ~~The~~ number of commissioners shall be six, with each member elected from single member districts and a county mayor elected county-wide. Each commissioner shall be a registered voter of and resident of the particular district he or she represents at the time of election to office and throughout the term of office.

Sec. 204. Terms of county commissioners.

- A. Commissioners shall be elected for terms of four years. Elections shall be staggered so that half of the total number of ~~three~~ commissioners will be elected every two years. The terms of office for the commissioners shall commence either on the second Tuesday following the general election or, if not inconsistent with general law, on such later date as set by ordinance, but in no case later than the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January following the general election.

- B. A county commissioner who has held the same commission district office for the preceding two full terms is prohibited from appearing on the ballot for re-election to that office. The initial abbreviated term required by Section 202.B. shall not constitute a full term for the purposes of the term limits imposed by this subsection. Preceding terms of county commissioners holding such offices upon the transition from six to eight commission districts shall count toward the term limits imposed by this subsection.