

The Board of County Commissioners

Escambia County is governed by a Board of County Commissioners composed of five members elected from five single member districts.

The Escambia County Charter Commission was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to study county government and to determine whether it might be improved or reorganized.

In considering whether the Board of County Commissioners should be reorganized, and if so, how it should be reorganized, the Charter Commission will be evaluating several options. For example:

- A. How many County Commissioners should serve on the Board?
 1. Should the five member Board be increased to 7, 9, 10 or some other number?
 2. Should all of the Commissioners be elected from single member districts, at large, or a combination of single member and at large?
- B. On what basis should the Commissioners be elected – partisan or nonpartisan?
- C. Should limits be placed on the number of terms that a Commissioner can serve? If so, what should those limits be?
- D. What salary should be paid for the services expected of a County Commissioner, and who should determine the amount of salary? Should the salary be set in the Charter, according to the State law, or by the Board of County Commissioners?
- E. Is the Board of County Commissioners expected to be a legislative body setting policy for the county, or should the Board or its members be expected to also provide administrative services?
- F. Should each of the Commissioners be provided with separate offices and administrative assistants or secretaries?
- G. How should vacancies be filled by the Governor, by the Board of County Commissioners, or through some other method?
- H. Should the Charter contain a non-interference clause prohibiting County Commissioners from directing the work of county employees who report to the County Administrator?
- I. Should the term of a County Commissioner be four years, as is the present practice, or should it be two years or some other number?

Those who favor establishing separate branches of local government believe the Board of County Commissioners should serve as the legislative branch and should concern itself primarily with policy-making, long range planning, and budgetary matters, and that the day-to-day administration of county services should be the responsibility of the County Administrator, who would head the administrative or executive branch of government. Those who oppose separate branches of local government believe it is necessary for their County Commissioners to both enact and administer policies for the county and to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the county.

Arguments made in favor of expanding the present five member Board of County Commissioners generally fall in the following categories:

- (1) Presently there are approximately 58,000 to 60,000 residents in each of the five districts. Expanding the number of Commissioners will provide greater representation to the citizenry.
- (2) Having five members of the Board makes it relatively easy for one strong member or clique to take control of the Board.
- (3) A greater number of Board members would make it less likely that one or more members would risk violating the Sunshine law.
- (4) A greater number of Board members would make it more likely that matters of substance would be debated and more closely scrutinized.
- (5) Adding at large members to the Board will bring a countywide perspective to the Board's deliberations.

Opponents to any expansion of the Board point out:

- (1) They are not in favor of any expansion which would result in a vote dilution for the minorities in the county.
- (2) Having more members of the Board could result in matters of substance being delayed because of excessive deliberations.
- (3) More members would incur more costs.
- (4) They disagree with the proponents that an expansion of the Board would make things better.

Proponents of having the Board of County Commissioners refrain from any interference in the day-to-day administration of county services suggests:

- (1) The inclusion of a non-interference clause in the Charter that would make interference by a Commissioner with the work of county employees a misdemeanor.
- (2) Reduction in the salary paid to County Commissioners to signify to the Commissioners that they are not expected to act as quasi-administrators.
- (3) Eliminating separate offices and separate secretaries for each County Commissioner will lessen the propensity of Commissioners to act as quasi-administrators.

Opponents argue that they expect their elected County Commissioners to represent them on a full time basis and to intervene on their behalf to obtain action from bureaucratic administrative staffs. They oppose any measures that would make it more difficult for their Commissioners to act as a quasi-administrator.

The Escambia County Charter Commission is very interested in hearing from the citizens of the county on their views of the duties and responsibilities to be assigned to the Board of County Commissioners, and their opinions on the options outlined herein or on other options they may desire to suggest to the Commission.