

Memorandum



Date May 2, 2014
To The Honorable Chair and Members of the Charter Review Commission
Subject Justification for Additional Review Time for Petition Verification

On Tuesday, April 15, 2014, as a Commission you approved the City Secretary's Office request to extend the petition verification period from 30 to 60 days (City Charter Chapter V § 1 Subsection (3) and City Charter Chapter XVIII § 12). On Monday, April 21, 2014, you received a request to reconsider that approval.

This communication serves as an appeal for you to stay by your initial decision to provide for a 60-day verification period for petitions. The purpose of my request is based solely on the working conditions and staffing concerns that exist when required to meet the 30-day deadline, which are noted below:

- Office staff (13 out of 16) is required to work 14-16 hour days, seven days a week until the verification process is complete (20 days). Duties include:
 - Petition verification
 - Oversight/quality check on work performed by non-department staff (temps)
 - Continuing to meet existing responsibilities and meeting deadlines
 - Performing new assignments that arise to meet city council, public and department needs; work does not stand still.

NOTE: Staff earns comp time as they are exempt. This later requires they take the extra time earned at a later date, which further hinders the effective operation of this office. With managers, the extra time is usually lost as responsibilities don't provide for time to be taken at a later date.

- Temp staff is also required to work 10-12 hour days.
 - The extensive work hours require even more oversight and quality check by office staff
 - Results in greater turnover
 - Additional training of new hires

NOTE: On two occasions, we exhausted the staffing level of the temp agency.

- There has been no space within City Hall to establish a single centralized work/verification area:
 - Temps are spread out, which requires the assignment of 1-2 office staff to manage each different work group
 - Temps work elbow-to-elbow; usually at folding tables.
- Lack of proper equipment and resources
 - Very few workers have a desktop computer, some use a laptop, while most are required to use Mobile Data Computers devices (MDC's) which further hinder ease of data entry
- Continual training
 - The availability of the same temp staff from verification job to verification job is very minimal; this requires new training every time.

NOTE: Additional time would further allow for the hiring of a reasonable amount of temps to reduce the issues outlined.

In a further attempt to determine the reasonableness of the request for additional time, one-on-one discussions were held directly with the respective city secretary/city clerk of the cities surveyed as to whether they would seek more time. The following responses were received:

- Austin – Has no position on additional time; typically, they get charter amendment petitions. Further, the verification for initiative/referendum petitions is outlined in their Standard Operating Procedures and not their City Charter, therefore, the change in allotted time could change at their discretion.
- El Paso – Would request more time, but no process in place for her to request such; indicated only one petition has been filed/verified in the last 26 years.
- Fort Worth – Will be asking for more time.
- Houston – Would definitely request more time; the last petition received was 15 years ago, so cannot determine how much more time would be requested.
- San Antonio – Will be asking for more time.

Please understand if we are given more time, that doesn't mean we would drag the verification process and use the full time allocated, unless absolutely necessary. We stay committed to verifying the petition as soon as possible. I am simply seeking time to allow for a standard work schedule to verify petitions that would create more humane working conditions for everyone involved.

I appreciate your consideration to stay with your initial decision.

Please let me know if you have any questions.



Rosa A. Rios
City Secretary

c: Bilierae Johnson, Assistant City Secretary
John Rogers, Assistant City Attorney
Anna Holmes, CRC Liaison, City Manager's Office