

MINNEAPOLIS PLAIN LANGUAGE CHARTER

Did you know that the Minneapolis Charter covers:

- Cleaning of tanneries and stables?
- Sprinkling of streets (to keep down dust, manure and flies)?
- Discharge of steam by locomotives?
- The size and weight of bread?
- The width of all tires used in the City?
- Regulation of the weighing of hay and straw?
- The construction of gasworks to supply gas for street lights?
- Regulation of the sale of coal (used for home heating) and lime (used in outhouses)?
- Regulation of the storage and use of dynamite?

Did you know our Charter contains four separate provisions about appointing officers? Three of them are wrong when read in isolation and are inconsistent with each other and you have to do legal research to know which is correct?

Did you know our Charter uses the word “doth” just like Shakespeare?

Did you know our Charter still thinks there is a Minneapolis Library Board—in reality abolished in 2008?

None of these things are really surprising. Our Charter was adopted in 1920. Because the good citizens of Minneapolis had rejected several previous draft Charters, one was cobbled together out of bits of State law and municipal ordinance. It has been amended more than one hundred times since, by the City Council, by the voters and by the legislature.

So it's a mess. It's inconsistent, disorganized, hard to read and a lot of it is wrong or obsolete.

For 11 years, the Charter Commission has been working on a complete rewrite of the Charter. They have spent thousands of volunteer hours, held numerous hearings, involved the City Attorneys' office and the independent Boards, City Departments and numerous other stakeholders. The goal was not to change the way we are governed but to rewrite the Charter using today's language, modernize it, organize it and eliminate obsolete and inconsistent provisions. It's called the Plain Language Charter. It's on the ballot in November.

The Plain Language Charter is organized, easy to understand, written in today's language, consistent and one-third as long as the existing charter.

We can't have an effective democracy if an ordinary citizen can't make sense out of our governing document, our “constitution.” We need a modern Charter.