

Mayor names committee Charter review to be thorough
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Mayor Ann Thane appointed a nine-member commission Tuesday, after vetoing the Common Council's resolution for its own commission appointments in April.

The council overrode Thane's veto and its seven-member commission started reviewing the charter in May.

Thane said revamping the charter is vital for the city and that's why she looked for people with experience for her commission.

Her appointments include: Chairman Peter Califano, vice chairman William Lorman, Anthony Agresta, Michael Chiara, Michael Dayian, Gina DeRossi, Aimee Fedullo, Albert Mancini and Curtis Peninger.

"These people were chosen for their various talents, experience and expertise in certain areas," Thane said. "For example, Mr. Lorman is a former corporation counsel; Mr. Mancini was involved in local politics for a long time; Mr. Chiara had a lengthy career in local government; Mr. Peninger is extremely interested in how municipal government impacts residents. I chose attorneys and people involved in politics because this is a legal document that we're revamping -- it's important to have people who understand."

Thane, a Democrat, appointed six Republicans out of the nine members, but she said political affiliation means nothing to her in this aspect.

"It doesn't matter to me what team they're on," she said. "What I'm looking for are intelligent people to weigh in on a document that's affected the community for a long time. The document we have now is loaded with problems and being that these individuals have looked at the document and have formed their own opinions on the document then I felt they were good choices for a charter review commission."

Third Ward Alderman Ronald J. Barone Sr. said the mayor has a right to create her own commission.

"Everybody has a right to create a commission; she had a right to create one," Barone said. "We live in a society where everyone has the freedom to do so, and so does she."

Barone has no issues with the creation of the second commission; however, he didn't like how it came to fruition so easily.

"What I don't understand is that we had to create our commission through a resolution that she vetoed and we had to override it," he said, "but she just got to appoint hers without any resolution or questioning. That's not too fair."

He said the charter review process should be "interesting" to witness.

"I don't want the process to get turned into some sort of mess regarding who's got what right and who can do what," he said. "I think we need to handle the charter's issues and it's probably good that there's two charter commissions to come up with ideas."

Barone doesn't think two commissions will slow the process and he expects his commission to bring forth ideas to the council by August.

Robert Going, chairman of the council's charter commission, said he does not know why the mayor created her own commission.

"I told [Thane] personally that our commission would be happy to entertain any ideas she or members of her administration might have to improve or clarify the charter," Going said. "I guess we'll just continue to do what we're doing; ultimately the people will decide on any changes."

Going said he is not worried the additional commission will interfere with overall charter work.

"The same thing happened before in 2004 and while the two commissions ended up focusing on different issues, the process ran rather smoothly," he said.

However, one issue that may surface when the commissions finish working on the charter is the fact that the mayor's commission takes precedence over the council's.

"If the mayor's commission submits a change to go on the ballot, no other commission can submit one," Corporation Counsel Gerard DeCusatis said.

Essentially, the mayor's commission can bypass the council and go directly to placing its ideas on the ballot for the residents to vote on, while the council's commission is required to take its recommendations to the council, which will decide what will go on the ballot.

DeCusatis said everything should go smoothly because of the precedence rule.

"You would have a chaotic situation without it," he said. "However, that doesn't mean the two commissions can't talk to agree on things so ideas from both commissions end up on the ballot."

Thane hopes the charter sparks conversations between the commissions and the results prove positive.

The mayor's commission will have its first meeting Thursday at 6:30 p.m. Thane said she will not be sitting in.