

Sarah Smallhouse: City taking right steps to improve



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The Tucson mayor and City Council members deserve recognition and praise for recent steps they have taken to make meaningful improvements to the structure and operations of Tucson city government.

These steps include:

- On April 8, the mayor and City Council created a committee to review and recommend revisions to Tucson's city charter, the document that establishes the roles, responsibilities, authorities and relationships that form Tucson's municipal government.
- They have appointed 15 capable and highly qualified committee members.
- And on July 8, they named an expert consultant to work with and guide the committee over the next year.

As we have learned from the experience of numerous other cities and businesses, the structure of an organization does much to determine the effectiveness of its officials and

employees. Our city officials have recognized the need to review and reform an outdated municipal framework to allow our community to thrive.

The Southern Arizona Leadership Council (SALC) and many other business and community organizations have long felt there is a need to review the city's current charter to identify specific areas for updating. We strongly support the city's charter review committee.

Toward this end, the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona established a special fund to provide the city a 3-to-1 matching contribution to hire an expert as a resource person for the committee. This will allow committee members to efficiently learn about reforms in other cities, and more quickly identify and evaluate weaknesses in Tucson's charter. The Brown Foundations have contributed to this fund, as the trustees view this as a strategic opportunity for the city of Tucson.

The hiring of Raphael Sonenshein as consultant to the committee was an important step.

Currently, Sonenshein is the executive director of the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State Los Angeles. He served as executive director of the commission whose efforts resulted in the first significant reworking of the Los Angeles charter in 75 years, and he has served as a consultant to successful charter committees for five other California cities. We can expect his experience and expertise to significantly benefit Tucson's charter review committee.

With these steps, the mayor and council members have done a good job creating the conditions for a successful charter change effort. They have provided the committee with the means to responsibly evaluate potential reforms and the latitude to recommend whatever changes committee members deem beneficial.

Now, the rest of us need to support this effort, help demonstrate broad community enthusiasm, and give due recognition to those serving on the committee for their commitment of time and effort. Active participation from the community is very important.

I encourage you to attend committee meetings and spread awareness of the work being done.

This process provides a rare chance to move toward a more efficient and accountable local government that will be better organized to provide us with the services we want at a reasonable cost.

Support the mayor and council in referring the committee recommendations to the November 2015 ballot, and finally — vote for a better future.

There is great potential to improve governance in the city of Tucson. It is vital that we provide our elected leaders and city administrators with the best structure possible to make certain we reach that potential.

Get involved

If you'd like to get involved, email the SALC office at pduncan@salc.org. You will be added to the coalition list and will receive emails with updates and meeting notices.