

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Greg Musil, Ed Peterson, and other members of the 2021 Johnson County KS Charter Review Commission

FROM: Mike Press and Hannes Zacharias, Former Johnson County Managers

DATE: Oct. 31, 2021

RE: Responses to questions regarding the current Johnson County KS Home Rule Charter.

Dear members of the 2021 Johnson County KS Charter Review Commission. We have been asked to respond to several questions regarding the Johnson County, Kansas Home Rule Charter as approved by Johnson County voters on Nov. 7, 2000 and still in force today. Below are our responses, respectfully submitted.

### **How is the current charter working/not working?**

It is our belief and experience that the 2000 Home Rule Charter was well conceived and has succeeded in achieving the vision of the 1999 Johnson County Charter Commission. Additionally, the existing document has worked very well over these past 20 years in service to the Johnson County community and does not warrant any revisions as this time.

### **Areas that could be improved in the charter operation.**

The only areas for improvement in the current charter operations are those that were advocated by the 2011 Charter Review Commission, but have not been implemented.

Specifically, the County Commission should create an on-going process to bring together cities and school districts within Johnson County to explore opportunities to maximize service delivery and cost reductions. Additionally, the County Commission should work to clarify state statutes regarding BOCC authority for appointment and removal to boards and committees.

### **How do the current county government operations compare with those under the prior charter?**

The 2000 Home Rule Charter laid the foundation for professional management of county operations and fiscal control. It provided clarity to the community and the organization on who is accountable for various county operations that was lacking before. Some specific examples include the migration of the Treasurer, Register of Deeds, and County Clerk positions from elected to appointed positions. These changes professionalized these departmental functions and yielded major improvements in the basic services provided by the county.

Additionally, the change to non-partisan elections of County Commissioners and Chairman provided a transparent and open selection process to fill a vacated County Commission seat when Annabeth Surbaugh gave up her seat as she became the first Chair of the Commission.

Implementation of the 2000 charter has been so successful that it has been presented as a 'model' for other county governments including St. Louis and Clay counties in Missouri.

**Any other observations?**

It is our view that the existing Home Rule Charter passed in 2000 has served the Johnson County community well and does not warrant any revisions at this time.

We appreciate the work of the 2021 Charter Review Commission and are ready to answer any other questions, either in person or in writing, as the Commission feels appropriate.