



# COMMON SENSE S A R A T O G A

Accountability. Transparency. Real Representation.

## VOTE YES FOR CHARTER REFORM

### Questions and Answers

#### **What is the foundation of the Charter Reform proposal?**

The Saratoga Springs 2020 Charter Reform proposal is a pro-active measure that provides accountability, representation and transparency within city government. The hallmarks of the proposal are:

- Replacing the Commissioner form of government the City presently has with a ward-based system which will provide direct representation to Saratoga Springs' diverse neighborhoods. Six wards are being proposed (see map) that will provide the initial class of new city councilmembers. Once the census is done, the new city council will revisit the wards to see if they need to be redrawn to enhance local representation.
- Strengthening the city-wide elected Mayor by making it a more robust and forward-thinking position. The Mayor will lead the City on policy initiatives and budgeting. The Mayor will be the City's ambassador—in inter-governmental relations as well as being its chief spokesperson. The Mayor will also sit on the City Council, as the position does now.
- Hiring a professional city manager to oversee the day to day operations of the City. The City Manager is hired and fired by the Mayor and City Council. The City Manager answers directly to the Mayor and City Council while the department heads answer to the City Manager.

These changes will create a municipal government that combines the strong political leadership of elected officials—Mayor and City Council—with the strong managerial experience of an appointed City Manager.

#### **Will Charter Reform create a responsive form of city government?**

Yes. The City Councilmembers are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent Saratoga Springs' neighborhoods allowing them to concentrate on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs and wishes. The City Manager is appointed by the Mayor and the City Council to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served. If the City Manager is not responsive, the Mayor and the City Council have the authority to terminate the manager at any time. In that sense, a manager's responsiveness is tested daily.

#### **What is the City Council's function?**

*The City Council will be our legislative body--its members are the community's representatives.* Power is centralized in the ward-based City Council which will, for example, approve the budget and determine the tax rate. The Council, along with the Mayor, hires a City Manager to implement the Council's policy initiatives, carry out administrative responsibilities and assure an efficient and smooth-running city government. The Mayor and the Council supervise the manager's performance.

## **What will the Mayor do?**

The Mayor will be strengthened in her or his role as the city's chief political leader and policy maker with a commensurate salary. The Mayor will continue to sit on the City Council which will bring the total votes in that body to seven. The mayor will

- Preside at council meetings
- Serve as Saratoga Springs' spokesperson and representative in intergovernmental relations
- Lead the Council's communication with and oversight of the City Manager and administrative functions of city government
- Assist the City Council in setting goals and advocating policy decisions
- Appoint members of the land-use and other boards with the advice and consent of the City Council

Together, the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager constitute a policy-development and management team.

## **What is the City Manager's job?**

The City Manager is hired to serve the Mayor, City Council and the community and to bring to the city the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs. The City Manager will:

- Manage financial and human resources
- Oversee the delivery of essential services
- Plan strategically for community development
- Make policy recommendations
- Use performance metrics to drive continuous improvement
- Commit to the highest level of ethical standards

The Mayor, City Councilmembers and citizens will depend on the City Manager to provide transparency, complete and objective information, pros and cons of alternatives, and long-term consequences.

## **How much will this cost?**

*Local governments that have implemented this form of government have saved money because overall costs were actually reduced with coordinated and unified management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, and the effective use of technology.*

For Saratoga Springs, Charter Reform means:

- Taxpayer savings of at least \$100,000 with a professional city manager at the helm\*
- New government with a strong policy-driven Mayor, elected representation for our neighborhoods and a professional manager would bring about additional savings through cooperation and accountability as the City moves forward
- The City can plan for the long-term with institutional memory built into city government and potentially save millions of dollars
- A strong, internal audit function will help cut costs and find thousands in additional savings
- There will no longer be expensive turnover costs when new Commissioners and/or Deputies are brought on board. Today a new Deputy Commissioner is paid over \$77,000 just to learn the ropes only to potentially be replaced by someone else at the next election.
- The new Charter will eliminate the present system that gives politicians lifetime free health coverage.
- The ability to bring new technology to city government implemented by professionals who understand the City's need and who can continue to streamline processes while saving substantial tax dollars.

*\*\$100,000 figure above provides for paying the full-time Mayor at a \$65,000 annual salary as well as the hiring of the city manager, assistant city manager and the hiring/contracting of an internal auditor as needed. There's still savings to be had.*