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Contact: Stewart Desmond (212) 669-4166

Anat Jacobson (212) 669-4743 or (646) 321-4400;

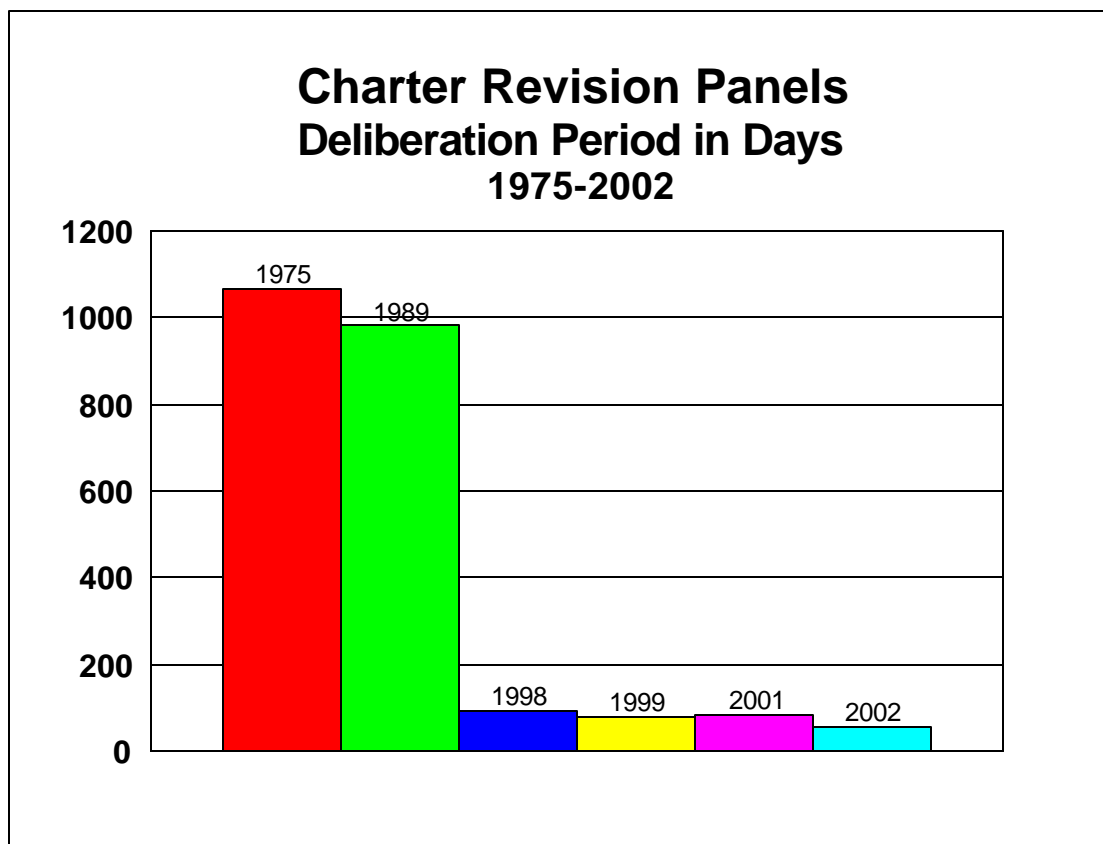
email ajacobson@pubadvocate.nyc.gov

Countdown to Charter Revision

*Gotbaum Criticizes Trend away from Open, Democratic Charter Reform
Only 44 Days Left Till Referendum Proposals Due*

When Mayor Bloomberg announced his charter revision panel on Friday, July 12, 2002, the panel had only 55 days to conduct research, propose changes and hold the required public hearings in all five boroughs. Today, they only have 45 days. Referendum proposals are due September 5 -- 60 days before the election.

Tomorrow, when the commission holds its first meeting, only 44 days will remain to carry out the task it has been assigned by the Mayor: to review the entire charter for change. In this rapidly diminishing period, the commission will apparently consider the profound change to New York City's governing structure of introducing nonpartisan elections.



Mayor Giuliani became notorious for hasty and politically-motivated charter change but never allowed so little time as this for the charter revision process. The 1998 commission, appointed on June 8, had 92 working days before referendum proposals were due. The 1999 commission had 81 days. In 2001, 85 days.

In earlier administrations, profound changes in the way the city is governed have been considered in a long and open deliberative process with public hearings and explanatory publications. The 1989 charter referendum, replacing the board of estimate with a new governing structure, was the product of two commissions and 32 months of deliberation.

The 1975 charter revisions commission was appointed on October 3, 1972, and offered its referendum proposals on September 6, 1975, allowing 35 months to formulate proposals and respond to public concern before offering a choice to the voters.

In answering a pre-election questionnaire for the Women's City Club last August, Mayor Bloomberg discussed his ideas for charter revision, "Election reforms such as evaluating special elections, non-partisan elections and various ballot access possibilities should be debated in a public forum and reported upon by the commission. It should be emphasized that Charter reform should encompass adequate time for due deliberation and debate." Is 44 days in the summer "adequate time for due deliberation"?

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum commented: "The statistics show a depressing trend in New York City away from an open process of charter change toward quick fixes rushed through for political purposes. This hasty process expresses contempt for public participation. The charter revision process is meant to include a serious effort to listen to public opinion before offering proposals for charter change. The administration justifies rushing the public hearing process through in August, the month least likely to find New Yorkers at home and able to participate in charter revision, by claiming the public already understands the issue of nonpartisan elections.

"In fact, the nonpartisan election process has not been widely discussed in this New York. Many feel nonpartisan elections will reduce minority representation just at the time that minorities can finally claim 55% of the city's population. Why the rush, Mayor Bloomberg? Let's find out what nonpartisan elections will mean to minority representation before making a decision."

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