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**SECTION:** LOCAL; Pg. B01**LENGTH:** 516 words**HEADLINE:** Charter panel taking its time;

GOVERNMENT: So far, the committee says no major changes have been proposed and voted on.

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## RIVERSIDE

The status quo is in fashion among members of the city's Charter Review Committee - at least so far.

The 17-member committee scrutinizing the city charter in an effort to modernize it and bring it more in line with the city's needs today has reached a provisional consensus on a few key issues, committee members said.

The outcome of the voting so far favors the existing state of affairs, committee Vice Chair Ben Johnson said.

"I think a lot of things are going to stay the same," Johnson said.

The charter is the city's constitution. Plans call for the Charter Review Committee to propose potential charter amendments for the City Council to place on the November ballot. The city's voters can change or repeal the charter by a majority vote.

At a meeting last month the committee voted on several issues, such as the council/city manager form of government and voting by wards.

"We're taking the easy ones first," Eric Haley, the committee chair, said.

"I think the highlight of it to date was the endorsement of the city manager form of government - the current system we have," Haley said. "I think the general sense is the division of authority functions well today."

The council sets the vision and policy for the city and the city manager makes sure city employees carry out the vision and policy.

The committee also voted in favor of preserving the ward system of council elections. A system proposed by council members Frank Schiavone and Ed Adkison, in which ward residents would elect two finalists in the primary then all city residents would vote in the general election on the two candidates in each ward, didn't gain traction with the committee.

Another vote was in favor of retaining the current number of

council wards, seven. The committee rejected the idea of changing the name "ward" to "district."

The committee also decided unanimously the charter should continue not to specify whether council positions are part-time or full-time.

Many charter reviews lead to little more than technical changes, said Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College.

"There's got to be political heat" from the community for there to be major changes, he said.

Mayor Ron Loveridge has predicted the ongoing process would produce no dramatic proposals for change.

Among the key issues the committee has yet to vote on:

- \* Who should set the salary for the mayor and council and how it should be calculated.

- \* The mayor's powers. The mayor now votes only to break ties and has a veto. Should he be given the right to vote and stripped of the veto?

- \* Whether local companies should be given a preference when city contracts are awarded.

- \* Pushing for a good demographic and geographic cross-section of representatives on city boards and commissions to reflect the city's diversity.

The committee's final deliberations are scheduled for June 24.

**LOAD-DATE:** April 1, 2004

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