

9-4-98

Spoke to Ken Thomson.

His concept is like yours. The NC is whomever shows up at the meetings. That's real, pure, New England, town hall, grassroots democracy. It's messy, and it doesn't guarantee that the diversity of opinions are always represented.

What some NCs have done to guard against one side or another stacking the meetings and tossing diversity out the window is to impose a requirement that those who vote must have attended \_\_\_ number of meetings in the past.

Although our plan isn't clear on this issue, it does call for the NCs to submit by-laws, prior to recognition, that ensure diversity on the boards, and which provides free and equal participation at their meetings from all stakeholders. However, you recently suggested that we take out the "equal" word. We could amend this language to be clearer about what we mean, unless you think it would shock people.

As drafted, our plan envisioned giving the NCs the flexibility to determine exactly how they would meet the basic requirements. I think we should leave it that way, rather than trying to put too much into the Charter. Perhaps an NC would want a provision whereby the board would be able to make some urgent decisions on its own. Maybe there are situations they will think of that we won't be able to think of in the next few weeks.

For instance, the NE District in Portland, they have now come to realize that many of their board members don't want to spend time doing the legal business of running a non-profit, and they prefer to spend time discussing local issues. So now they're changing their by-laws to set up two boards -- one to run the non-profit association, and the other to discuss local issues. You wouldn't want Charter language that dictating their leadership structure so that it wouldn't allow them to make a change like this.

And I realized what the answer was to Erwin's question after I got back to the office. You wouldn't want to make this same town hall requirement of the City Council and its decisions because it's an entirely different animal that what we're proposing.

The City Council, and other formally elected decision-makers, are part of the representative part of our democracy. They exist to make decisions on behalf of those who elected them using whichever methods they choose to solicit input.

What we are proposing, however, is to create and support the participatory part of the democracy that is much stronger in some other cities than it is here. Because their prime function is to encourage participation in government and in their neighborhoods, its success depends upon maximum public involvement.

These are two different systems that complement each other.