



Legislation Text

File #: 2007-0437, **Version:** 1

AN ORDINANCE relating to enhancing citizen participation, civic engagement and citizenship education in county government, creating a volunteer citizen councilor network within the legislative branch; and adding a new chapter to K.C.C. Title 1.

PREAMBLE:

Freedom of speech, freedom of petition and freedom of assembly are hollow rights if people feel unable to be heard.

Freedom to be heard is not mentioned in the United States Constitution and thus is a right reserved to the people under the ninth amendment.

The purpose of this initiative is to enhance citizen participation, civic engagement and citizenship education in government. There is a need to create a citizen councilor network of small discussion groups, open to all citizens, self-funded and using symbolic and sustainable dialogue to communicate among political and other community leaders and the people at large. One key to a sustainable community is an informed and sustainable dialogue among leaders and people. Citizens need new, more convenient and effective ways to share their opinions with other citizens and the leaders of their organizations, institutions and governments. This is a process of building social capital through both bonding and bridging dialogue and improving community mental health and happiness--one of the goals of all governments, which seek, as they should, to protect and enhance the basic human rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The intent is to improve the people's freedom to be heard by providing, without cost to those participating, an enhanced public arena for effective civic engagement. Similar to advisory voting, but less expensive and more collaborative, this process enables all interested citizens to contribute their opinions in a convenient and efficient manner.

This initiative will establish a feedback communication system by establishing a network of volunteer citizen councilors, coordinated by the King County auditor's office, where all interested citizens can meet in small groups and share their opinions on topics of public interest for discussion and tabulation. Topics will be selected periodically by the auditor based on suggestions made by participants and public officials. The program encourages citizen volunteers to meet in small groups at convenient times and places such as neighborhood homes or workplaces, and provides valuable feedback on important public issues. Participant opinions will be tabulated and shared with participants, interested public officials, news media and the general public. The program will be self-funded without taxpayer dollars through voluntary contributions from participants, civic-minded citizens, businesses, organizations and foundations.

The accounting profession has fully developed financial audits of tangible accounting for fraud but has not yet developed ways to measure intangible accounting of human assets, such as the esprit de corps and stakeholder interests and concerns of citizens in their various roles as taxpayers, clients, patients, consumers, workers and members of organizations.

The auditor has a charter responsibility and serves the citizens of King County by promoting accountability, fiscal integrity and openness in local governments.

State Initiative 955 was filed January 8, 2007, and is the model legislation for this similar initiative to the King County council. Initiative 955 can be viewed in its entirety at:

<http://secstate.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/people.aspx#955>. For more information, see also

<http://EasyCitizenInvolvement.com> and <http://ForumFoundation.org>.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

SECTION 1. Sections 2 through 12 of this ordinance should constitute a new chapter in K.C.C. Title 1.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 2. The people of King County recognize that many citizens have difficulty participating meaningfully in government processes that rely primarily on public hearings held at locations that are often distant from their residences or workplaces or held at inconvenient times. To increase and enhance citizen participation in county and local government, this ordinance establishes and supports a self-funded program in cooperation with the auditor and the clerk of the council of King County by which every interested citizen could receive information about public issues, discuss these issues with other citizens at convenient times and places and record their opinions in an efficient, objective and anonymous way, so as to provide valuable feedback to elected officials, community leaders and the public.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 3.

A. The office of citizen councilor is established in the auditor's office of the legislative branch. Any person who lives or works in King County and volunteers to act as an official government advisor may become a citizen councilor by sending a letter to the clerk of the council, calling a local or toll-free telephone number or signing up on a website. Citizen councilors shall act collectively as a sounding board for the county on important public issues selected by the auditor. Conveners of citizen councilor groups shall be those designated by the citizen councilor coordinator from those citizen councilors who volunteer to host a group. Every effort shall be made to assign citizen councilors to a group that meets at a convenient time and place for those participating. Meetings will usually be in small groups.

B. Citizen councilors may participate:

1. In a citizen councilor group of approximately four to twelve persons, ideally eight to twelve persons, usually organized by residence or work area zip code with the assistance of the citizen councilor coordinator;

2. In a citizen councilor organizational group under section 9 of this ordinance; or
3. As an individual if the person is unable to attend meetings in groups due to age, disability, remote

location or otherwise.

C. A citizen councilor may be reassigned to a different group on request to assure that the group meeting place, time and makeup is convenient and compatible.

D. For the purposes of this section and sections 4 through 12 of this ordinance:

1. "Councilor" means an official advisor to a sovereign or chief magistrate;
2. "Citizen councilor" means a person who lives or works in King County and volunteers to act as an official government advisor pursuant to this ordinance;
3. "Citizen councilor convener" or "convener" means a citizen councilor who agrees, at the request of the citizen councilor coordinator, to host a meeting of citizen councilors at a home, workplace, or elsewhere;
4. "Citizen councilor communicator" or "communicator" means a citizen councilor who assists a convener by obtaining and distributing the approved background materials used at each meeting and then facilitates the transmission of participant opinions back to the citizen councilor coordinator;
5. "Citizen councilor coordinator" or "coordinator" is the volunteer administrator of the citizen councilor network, as appointed by the auditor;
6. "Value reporter" means any person assigned by the coordinator to gather information on the issue or issues selected by the auditor;
7. "Participation window" is the designated time period, usually consisting of thirty consecutive days, in which citizen councilors have to meet, discuss a topic, and share their opinions by completing an opinionnaire; and
8. "Opinionnaire" means an objective survey instrument based on participation and administrative theory using social resonance technology developed by the Forum Foundation. An opinionnaire is different from a "questionnaire" which is an objective, random-sample survey instrument based on statistical and

mathematical theory. An opinionnaire uses yes/no, multiple choice, Likert scale, end anchor and value questions or statements, to which participants respond objectively in a manner that allows for easy tabulation of participant opinions. In addition, an opinionnaire always allows participants to respond anonymously and allows participants to respond with an "object" or "abstain" and these responses are recorded and reported along with all other responses so that participants never feel pushed to answer a question that they believe is misleading or when they simply aren't prepared to make a decision based on the information they currently have.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 4.

A. The King County executive is hereby encouraged, but not required, to prepare by March 1 of each year a citizen councilor network opinionnaire. The opinionnaire shall be based on the concerns of the executive and consist of no more than thirty questions on no more than four pages.

B. Each councilmember may submit to the auditor by March 15 of each year a list of no more than twenty questions on no more than four pages to be added to the opinionnaire issued by the executive for response by citizen councilors in each councilmember's district. The citizen councilor coordinator may add questions in a district if a councilmember does not do so. The citizen councilor coordinator may edit all questions submitted but only for grammar, style and consistency with the overall opinionnaire and the space available.

C. If the executive does not prepare a citizen councilor network opinionnaire by March 1, the auditor shall do so with the assistance of the citizen councilor coordinator.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 5.

A. After consulting with interested citizens and community leaders in the manner described below, the auditor shall select the issue or issues that will be discussed during each meeting or participation window of the citizen councilor network. These meetings will usually be held approximately quarterly but not more than monthly. The auditor's selection shall be made from suggestions received from the executive, councilmembers,

other state and local public officials, community and business leaders, clubs, unions and associations, agencies, municipalities and individual citizen councilors. Recommendations received for consideration by the citizen councilor network shall be forwarded and reviewed by an advisory citizen councilor steering committee composed of representatives of the following:

1. The county executive or the executive's representative;
2. King County councilmembers or the councilmembers' representatives;
3. The executive director of the Puget Sound Regional Council or the executive director's representative;
4. The superintendent of each school district in King County or the superintendent's representative;
5. The mayor of each city in the county or the mayor's representative;
6. The county executive from adjacent counties or the executive's representative;
7. The president of a community college, college or university located in King County or the president's representative;
8. A representative from any organization participating in the citizen councilor network that has twenty-five or more groups of four to twelve persons each under section 9 of this ordinance;
9. The citizen councilor coordinator and the coordinator's two deputies selected as provided in section 6 of this ordinance; and
10. Others invited by the auditor.

B. All members of the advisory citizen councilor steering committee shall serve without remuneration. Travel expenses for steering committee members may be provided on request if funds are available.

C. After considering the advice of the steering committee, the auditor shall determine and assign the issue or issues approved for discussion to the volunteer citizen councilor coordinator for preparation and implementation by volunteer staff. The first meeting of a group will usually be an orientation meeting using a standardized agenda prepared by the coordinator and approved by the auditor. All persons assigned by the

coordinator to gather information on the issue or issues selected by the auditor shall be called "value reporters." Value reporters shall always be careful to present each issue and all related materials as evenhandedly as possible, taking care to present the generally prevailing viewpoints from experts, officials, scholars and others in an effort to provide participants with useful information for their discussion. Whenever practical, all interviews with experts, officials, scholars, leaders and others shall be electronically recorded. Before any materials are published, however, persons interviewed or quoted shall approve their interview or quote for release, or complete another interview to their satisfaction; otherwise their statement shall not be included in the materials distributed.

D. The auditor shall refer the public information material obtained by the value reporters and edited by the citizen councilor coordinator to the steering committee members for their review and advisory recommendations. The auditor shall make the final determination concerning the suitability of all materials, including background information on the issues presented and the opinionnaire, before these are distributed.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 6. The office of citizen councilor coordinator is created within the office of the auditor. The auditor shall appoint the citizen councilor coordinator and two deputy citizen councilor coordinators with the advice of the steering committee, if available. The citizen councilor coordinator and deputy citizen councilor coordinators shall serve at the pleasure of the auditor, until terminated with the approval of the steering committee, and shall be citizen volunteers and serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred in carrying out their duties under sections 2 through 12 of this ordinance as funds are available.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 7.

A. The citizen councilor coordinator shall:

1. Promote the citizen councilor program;
2. Oversee preparation, tabulation, summarization and dissemination of citizen councilor materials

and data;

3. Receive, on behalf of the citizen councilor revolving fund, gifts and donations of real or personal property, including cash, in-kind services and licenses;
4. Hire paid staff to assist the volunteer staff if the auditor agrees that doing so would be worthwhile and that sufficient funds are available;
5. Contract for any necessary or appropriate services including without limitation a local or toll-free telephone number and answering service, keying, optical scanning, computer tabulation, recording, reporting, research, consulting, printing and mailing to carry out sections 2 through 12 of this ordinance;
6. Recruit volunteers to assist in administering the program, including conveners, communicators and value reporters;
7. Recruit individual citizen councilors to participate in local groups organized by mutual convenience usually within the same residence or work zip code areas of King County;
8. Assign value reporters to record electronically interviews with scholars, experts, public officials, planners, leaders and others concerning topics of discussion assigned by the auditor;
9. Produce electronic audio-visual and printed materials, including opinionnaires, as evenhandedly as possible;
10. Mail or distribute electronically public information materials to citizen councilor communicators for group conveners or individual citizen councilors, or both, after final approval by the auditor;
11. Provide, at cost, the contact information for a participating organization's own conveners, communicators and councilors on request if a separate iteration of the organization's own constituents is desired at its own time and expense;
12. Use machine-scan, interactive telephone, or computer technology to record citizen councilor responses and tabulate data using the symbolic dialogue and social technology developed by the Forum Foundation;
13. Prepare summary reports including percentage responses and "polarization-consensus" and

"modified polarization-consensus" ratings of participant opinions, issue press releases and post data for public analysis on a website.

14. Mail, email, post to the Internet or otherwise provide for transmission of summary reports to participants, participating organizations, interested public officials and news media; and

15. Maintain all data generated for public and media reference in the auditor's office and post information to the Internet to ensure easy public access.

B. The clerk of the council shall facilitate the process created by this ordinance by providing upon request information on the charter, initiatives, referendums, ordinances and voters' materials for consideration by the citizen councilor network participants in their dialogues and deliberations.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 8. The citizen councilor coordinator shall actively encourage citizen councilor groups to form throughout the county. Citizen councilor groups will meet at mutually convenient times and places as determined by each convener, during a designated time period or participation window that will usually consist of thirty consecutive days. Citizen councilor groups will usually meet quarterly but never more than monthly. They shall have the opportunity to review materials, consider electronic audiovisual presentations, or both, articulating an issue of public interest or concern prepared as described in section 4 of this ordinance. Citizen councilors shall then have the opportunity to discuss the issue and information with each other and anonymously record their opinions using an approved interactive response technology such as individual mark-sense response sheets, interactive telephone or an interactive website for return to the citizen councilor coordinator for tabulation and reporting.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 9. Four through twelve citizens from organizations including, but not limited to, community service, civic association, cooperative, club, union, association, religious, business or school district groups may enroll as an organizational group with its own conveners and communicators. An organizational profile report or login to a website shall be provided without cost to the leaders of organizations with twenty-five or more groups to inform them of how their members responded. All such information shall

be posted on a website for easy public review.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 10.

A. Each citizen councilor may periodically be asked to make voluntary donations to help cover the costs of the citizen councilor program. The voluntary donation is estimated to be ten dollars per person per year at present costs.

B. It is the intention of this ordinance that donations and gifts should be solicited from individuals, businesses and foundations to assist in the funding of the program. However, because all direct costs of this program are provided by voluntary donations with no funds from public sources, the auditor, with the advice of the citizen councilor coordinator, shall use the auditor's discretion in determining the scale and the scope of the program so that expenses do not exceed available funds.

C. Libraries are hereby encouraged, but not required, to participate and allow citizens who are not members of a citizen councilor group to respond to any opinionnaire during any participation window. A nominal fee of fifty cents to one dollar may be charged to cover the direct costs to participating libraries and the citizen councilor network.

NEW SECTION. SECTION. 11. A citizen councilor revolving fund is created and shall consist of voluntary donations collected under sections 2 through 12 of this ordinance. The treasurer shall be custodian of the revolving fund. Disbursements from the revolving fund shall be authorized by the citizen councilor coordinator or the coordinator's deputy and according to any oversight and procedure deemed appropriate by the auditor in order to maintain an effective expenditure and revenue control.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 12.

A. The auditor may provide the citizen councilor coordinator and the coordinator's deputies and volunteer staff with unused space in existing county offices if such space is available and appropriate for this use.

B. The citizen councilor coordinator shall seek donations from citizen councilor organizational groups,

citizen councilors, individuals, community service organizations, businesses and foundations to help cover the costs of the program. When ten thousand dollars in cash donations have been received, the auditor shall authorize the citizen councilor coordinator to establish a telephone number, answering service and website to develop a list of the names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of:

1. Persons interested in serving as citizen councilors, citizen councilor communicators or conveners;
2. Communicators, conveners and councilors in citizen councilor organizational groups; and
3. Persons interested in making donations.

C. When at least one thousand people have signed up to participate as citizen councilors and a total of at least twenty thousand dollars in cash donations has been received, the auditor shall initiate the new communication process contemplated in sections 2 through 12 of this ordinance and continue it at a scope and scale that is supportable by the resources available.

D. In the event the program under sections 2 through 12 of this act fails to receive donations sufficient to support the direct costs of a minimal program, and thus needs to be terminated, funds remaining after payment of all outstanding expenses and disposal of equipment and supplies owned shall be deposited in the county's general fund.

SECTION 13. The citizen councilor network created by this ordinance is based on ideas developed by the nonprofit Forum Foundation, an educational research organization based in King County. In recognition of the Forum Foundation's pioneering work in this field, all participant opinions shall be tabulated using the fast forum computer program and related technology developed by the Forum Foundation since 1970. This requirement shall be met only if a license to use the program and related technology without charge is donated to the county by the Forum Foundation in accordance with section 7 of this ordinance.

SECTION 14. If any provision of this ordinance or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the ordinance or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

none