

**City of Brookings, South Dakota
Final Report to the City Council
City Charter Revision Project
Final Report
Submitted by the National Civic League
on behalf of the Brookings City Charter Commission**

January 2025

City of Brookings 2024 Charter Review Report

Introduction

The City of Brookings adopted a Home Rule Charter, which was approved by voters on November 5, 2002, to establish a more representative and effective government. This charter granted the city greater autonomy in local governance, enabling a tailored and efficient administration. Combining the leadership of elected officials with the professional expertise of an appointed City Manager, the charter has served as the city's foundational governance document since its adoption.

In 2024, the City of Brookings initiated a charter review process to ensure the document remains effective, relevant, and responsive to the community's needs. Regular reviews of the charter provide an opportunity to evaluate policies, identify areas for improvement, and align with changes in state laws, community values, and administrative practices.

Role of the National Civic League

To guide this process, the City Council retained the National Civic League (NCL), the nation's oldest good government organization, founded in 1894 as the National Municipal League. The League introduced the first Model City Charter in 1900 to address corruption and ensure efficiency in local governance. Brookings' original 2002 City Charter was based on this Model City Charter, which is now in its ninth edition and recognized globally as the standard for the council-manager form of government.

The League's expertise helped ensure that the review process promoted transparency, accountability, and efficiency in governance while fostering community involvement and trust.

The City Charter Commission

The City Council appointed a City Charter Commission comprising a diverse group of residents representing private, public, nonprofit, and community sectors. The commission members brought expertise in legal knowledge, government structures, community values, and historical understanding of the charter's origins and intent.

Commission Members

The City Council appointed the following Brookings residents to the City Charter Commission. David Gilbertson was elected Chair, and Dr. Lisa Hager was elected Vice Chair during the first meeting by commission members:

- David Gilbertson, Chair
- Dr. Lisa Hager, Vice Chair
- Bob Burns
- Keith Corbett
- Van Fishback

- Jeanne Manzer
- Dianne Nagy
- Ashley Ragsdale
- Gail Robertson
- Roger Solum
- Tom Yseth

These volunteer members, working without compensation, collaborated to ensure integrity and transparency throughout the review process.

Responsibilities

The commission was tasked with:

1. Reviewing the existing Brookings City Charter and its government structure.
2. Understanding government procedures and their relationship to the charter.
3. Ensure the desired principles of local government are built into the charter amendments.
4. Identifying areas for review and explaining the rationale behind those reviews.
5. Defining desired outcomes for charter changes.
6. Drafting clear, accessible amendments.
7. Conducting the commission work with integrity so residents view the outcomes as credible.
8. Engaging with the community and encouraging public participation.

Commission members took their responsibilities seriously and freely brought up different points of view to be discussed among the membership. Throughout the process, the dialogue remained highly civil as members listened to each other and worked toward an agreement that all members could live with and support.

Charter Review Process

The process began in June 2024, with the National Civic League interviewing council members and department directors to gather input on areas needing review. Key areas identified for review included diversity, equity, and inclusion; land use; public engagement; eligibility for elected office; and financial procedures for transparency and efficiency.

Key Values and Principles

The commission identified principles of local government that would guide their work:

Internal Values and Principles (in how City Government operates):

- Operational efficiency and fiscal responsibility
- Responsiveness to community interests
- Public service integrity
- Accessible and convenient elections

External Values and Principles (in how City Government works with the community it serves):

- Fairness and non-arbitrary treatment of interests
- Citizen involvement through commissions and committees
- Transparency and accountability
- Active public engagement

These principles informed the commission’s approach to reviewing and updating the charter throughout the process.

Community Participation Beyond the City Charter Commission

As noted earlier, the charter commission was comprised entirely of Brookings community residents. City Charter Commission meetings were publicized and open to residents, with opportunities for input. Key contributions from community members who attended meetings included:

- **September 19, 2024:** Lawrence Novatny supported adding “sex and gender identity” to Article VII, Section 8.02 to align with the city’s nondiscrimination ordinance. This recommendation was unanimously approved.
- **December 16, 2024:** Mike McClemans and Zeno Wicks advocated for greater City Council involvement in the appointment process for the City Clerk and City Attorney. The commission clarified that collaborative hiring and supervision was a core principle of the proposed amendments in these areas.

Key Updates and Changes

Through their work, the commission identified and implemented several significant updates:

Structural and Governance Updates

1. **Appointment Processes:**
 - Clarified collaboration between the City Manager and City Council in appointing the City Clerk and City Attorney.
 - Defined the City Manager’s supervisory role in consultation with the City Council.
2. **City Manager Residency Requirement:**
 - Added a residency requirement for the City Manager to ensure local awareness and accountability.

Operational Improvements

1. **Financial Procedures:**
 - Enhanced transparency and efficiency in budgeting by updating submission dates, required information, public hearings, and amendment/adoption processes.

2. **Inclusivity:**
 - Incorporated “inclusive community participation” as a foundational principle in the preamble to emphasize its overarching importance throughout the document.
3. **Terminology Updates:**
 - Modernized language (e.g., replacing “handicap” with “disabled”).
4. **Charter Review Frequency:**
 - Established a decennial review process while providing flexibility for updates as needed.
5. **Council Interaction with Staff:**
 - Maintained the current policy requiring council members to communicate with staff through the City Manager rather than include it in the city charter.

Policy-Specific Decisions

1. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**
 - Integrated with the term inclusiveness in the preamble as a key part of “inclusive community participation” as an integral part of effective and trusted governance. This was also addressed in Article VIII – General Provisions.
2. **Land Use:**
 - Determined to be best addressed in ordinances and policies to allow adaptability.
3. **Public Engagement:**
 - Incorporated throughout the charter (e.g., preamble, referendum, budget), with specific approaches delegated to ordinances and policies.
4. **Wards and Representation:**
 - Retained the current system due to its current effectiveness, with provisions for future review as the city grows.
5. **Felony Disqualification for Office:**
 - No changes were needed, as state law governs eligibility once civil rights are restored.

Overall, the City Charter revision effort turned out to be more of a cleanup and update of the 2002 City Charter. There were no large or consequential changes made.

Next Steps

This report, with its accompanying addendums, will be submitted to the City Council for action on January 16, 2025. Once approved, the revised City Charter will be given to the City Clerk and City Attorney as they prepare the ballot measure that will be voted on at the April 8, 2025, election.

Concurrently, the City Charter Commission will commence on a multi-faceted community outreach effort with the first public meeting scheduled for January 2025. This meeting will include targeted invitations as well as an open invitation to the public.

Additional outreach efforts will include:

- Videos featuring commission members to be shared on the city’s cable channel, website, and social media platforms. Links to current videos to date:
 - Brookings City Charter (short): <https://youtu.be/SKmyHTxtH20>
 - Chair David Gilbertson – review of the process and outcomes: <https://youtu.be/KmrtfaE3PLs>
 - Commission Member Dianne Nagy: <https://youtu.be/5aGtiNq1SF0>
 - Commission Member Bob Burns: <https://youtu.be/QFaEMkWrRDw>
- Articles and op-eds on the charter process and updates.
- Presentations to community organizations and groups.
- Press releases and social media campaigns with QR codes for easy access to information.
- Posters placed in public spaces, such as libraries.
- Media coverage, including interviews with commission chairs.
- Additional public forums, as needed.

Conclusion

The 2024 City of Brookings charter review reflects a commitment to maintaining an effective, transparent, and inclusive local government. Through collaboration among the Charter Commission, National Civic League, and the community, the updated charter aligns foundational principles with the evolving needs of Brookings residents. This periodic review process fosters trust, adaptability, and accountability in local governance.

Addendums

2024 Marked (red-lined) City Charter
2024 Unmarked City Charter
Summary of Changes
Edit List – List of all the Revisions