Finding aid to the San Francisco Charter Commission Records

Finding aid prepared by Tami Suzuki.
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2009; revised 2011
Title: San Francisco Charter Commission Records

Date (inclusive): 1931-1980
Date (bulk): 1979-1980

Collection Identifier: SFH 25

Creator: San Francisco (Calif.). Charter Commission.

Physical Description: 2 cartons (2.0 cubic feet)

Contributing Institution: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
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Abstract: This collection documents the work of the San Francisco Charter Commission, which met from 1978 to 1980 and put forth a new city charter on the November 4, 1980 ballot. The measure, Proposition A, failed. Materials include charter history, drafts and final text, reports, surveys, minutes and hearing summaries, public comments, a facilitator's manual, a speakers manual, legal opinions, campaign materials, press releases, and newspaper clippings.

Physical Location: The collection is stored offsite.

Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.

Access
The collection is open for research. A minimum of two working days' notice is required for use. Please call the San Francisco History Center for hours and information at 415-557-4567.

Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the City Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Francisco Public Library as the owner of the physical items.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], San Francisco Charter Commission Records (SFH 25), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Provenance
Transferred from the San Francisco Charter Commission as it disbanded in 1980.

Related Materials

Processing Information

Organizational History
The charter is San Francisco's constitution. The San Francisco Charter Commission was established as a result of voter approval of Proposition L in June 1978 ("Declaration of Policy: Shall the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco act to call an election to choose charter commissioners, who would thereafter prepare and propose a revised City and County Charter for subsequent approval by the voters of San Francisco?") and Proposition X in November 1978 ("Shall a Charter Commission be elected to propose a new charter or to revise the charter?"). These measures each called for the election of 15 commissioners, who were elected in November 1978. The commissioners were charged with proposing a new charter or revising the existing charter that was adopted in 1932 and later amended over 500 times.

The first city charter was adopted in 1898, creating a "strong mayor" form of government. Reformers in the 1920s succeeded in voter adoption of a new charter in 1932, establishing a chief administrative officer to direct most of the city's departments. Under this charter, power was diffused throughout the city. Over time, numerous incremental charter changes made governing arrangements more complex.

Charter revision was attempted several times--including three failed attempts--but resulted in little change. A fourth committee made recommendations that appeared on the November 1968 ballot (Proposition E) but was defeated. A reconstituted committee then rearranged charter sections more logically with no substantive changes. This recodification passed in November 1971 (Proposition R).
The main principles of the 1979-1980 commission’s proposed document were to simplify the charter and make it an enabling document, to give authority to the responsible official, make different branches of government plan priorities cooperatively, and fix responsibility and structures between branches of government, in addition to holding elected officials responsible. Over a nearly 2-year period, the group conducted over 70 public hearings, 2 surveys, and a public education program, and prepared 2 drafts and a final version.

Among other things, the proposed new charter, Proposition A, gave more authority to the mayor, reduced the chief administrative officer’s term from 10 to 4 years, reduced the controller’s term from life to 6 years, required that women be included on each commission and board, and gave greater status to the Human Rights Commission.

Proposition A failed, 46 percent to 54 percent, on Nov. 4, 1980.

Scope and Contents
This collection documents the work of the San Francisco Charter Commission, which met from 1978 to 1980 and put forth a new city charter on the November 4, 1980 ballot. The measure, Proposition A, failed. Materials include charter history, drafts and final text, reports, surveys, minutes and hearing summaries, public comments, a facilitator’s manual, a speakers manual, legal opinions, campaign materials, press releases, and newspaper clippings.

Arrangement
The collection is organized into 5 series: Series 1: Meetings; Series 2: Reports and Charter Text; Series 3: Public Education and Participation Program; Series 4: Yes on A Campaign; and Series 5: Reference Materials. Within each series, materials are organized chronologically.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
San Francisco (Calif.). Charter Commission. -- Archives
County charters--California--San Francisco
Municipal charters--California--San Francisco
San Francisco (Calif.)-- Politics and government.
San Francisco (Calif.)--Charters

Series 1 Meetings, 1978-1980
Physical Description: 0.75 cubic feet
Scope and Contents
This series includes minutes, hearing summaries, and commission training materials.

Box 1, Folder 1 Commission workshop materials, Feb. 1979
Box 1, Folder 2 Budget and organization of committee, 1979-1980
Box 1, Folders 3-6 Minutes, agendas, and hearing summaries, 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 7 Executive Director job opening, [1979]
Box 1, Folders 8-9 Administration and Finance Committee, 1979
Box 1, Organization of Government Committee, 1979-1980
Folders 10-11 Personnel Administration Committee, 1979-1980
Box 1, Folders 12-13

Series 2 Reports and Charter Text, 1979-1980
Physical Description: 0.6 cubic feet
Scope and Contents
Includes surveys, reports, and draft and final proposed charter text.

Box 1, Folder 14 Working papers, 1979-1980
Box 1, Folder 15 First interim report, October 1979
Box 1, Folder 16 Management symposium summary, January 1980
Box 1, Folder 17 Baseline survey and findings, January-March 1980
Box 1, Folder 18 Baseline survey facilitator’s handbook, February 1980
Box 2, Folder 1 Follow-up survey and findings, May-August 1980
Box 2, Folder 2 Survey business, December 1979-June 1980
Box 2, Folder 3 First discussion draft, January 1980
Box 2, Folder 4  Working papers for second draft, May-June 1980
Box 2, Folder 5  Second discussion draft, June 1980
Box 2, Folder 6  Third draft, July 1980
Box 2, Folder 7  Comments from city agencies and the public, April-July 1980
Box 2, Folder 8  Comparison of proposals with 1932 charter, July 1980
Box 2, Folder 9  Legal opinions, November 1979-August 1980
Box 2, Folder 10  Proposed charter, August 1980
Box 2, Folder 11  Summary of proposed charter, August 1980
Box 2, Folder 12  Revised text, November 1980

Series 2 Reports and Charter Text, 1979-1980

Series 3 Public Education and Participation Program, 1979-1980

Physical Description: 0.33 cubic feet

Scope and Contents

This series includes a speaker's manual and press releases used for public education.

Box 2, Folder 13  Advisory Committee, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 14  Report, March 1980
Box 2, Folder 15  Speaker's manual, 1980
Box 2, Folder 16  Literature, 1980
Box 2, Folder 17  Press releases, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 18  Radio and television public service announcements, March-August 1980
Box 2, Folder 19  News clippings, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 20  Photographs, undated-1980

Series 4 Yes on A Campaign, 1980

Physical Description: 7.0 folders

Scope and Contents

Includes press releases and ballot arguments.

Box 2, Folder 21  Commissioners' signatures, August 1980
Box 2, Folder 22  Steering Committee meetings, August-October 1980
Box 2, Folder 23  Television and radio spots, August-October 1980
Box 2, Folder 24  Press releases, September-October 1980
Box 2, Folder 25  Slate cards, October-November 1980
Box 2, Folder 26  Ballot arguments, November 1980
Box 2, Folder 27  Charter revision in San Francisco, 1980

Series 5 Reference Materials, 1931-1980

Physical Description: 0.33 cubic feet

Scope and Contents

Includes reports and text of other San Francisco charter revision efforts.

Box 2, Folder 28  Charter, 1931
Box 2, Folder 29  Charter legislation history, 1965
Box 2, Folder 30  Charter legislation history, 1969
Box 2, Folder 31  Proposition E text, 1969
Box 2, Folder 32  Committee reports, 1969-1972
Box 2, Folder 33  Charter, 1978
Box 2, Folder 34  News clippings, related, 1978-1980
Box 2, Folder 35  Charter amendment: Senior Executive Service project report, September 1979