

**First Report of the Executive Director  
to the Macomb County Charter Commission  
February 22, 2009**

Honorable Charter Commissioners:

This will serve as my first formal report to the Board of Charter Commissioners.

In addition to attendance at all Commission and Committee meetings, office work and research, we have conducted meetings with various officials from within and without County government. As a general rule, these meetings begin with an overview of the commission's most current work, followed by a discussion of its timeline, and ended with a request for suggestions to be passed along to one or more committees.

I report to you on those executive level meetings as follows:

Macomb County Public Works Commissioner, Anthony V. Marrocco and his Chief Deputy, William Misterovich were consulted early on in my tenure. After a brief review of the commission's form, membership, and early direction, the discussion turned to the issue of the Drain Commissioner reference in the county charter enabling act. Mr. Misterovich was kind enough to provide some legal reference work that has been passed on to our commission attorneys. That information seems to resolve a conflict of laws problem in favor of maintaining the status quo for the Macomb County Department of Public Works and the office of Public Works Commissioner.

In a meeting with Macomb County Board Chair Paul Gielegem, with Charter Commission Chairperson Femminineo in attendance, another brief overview of the commission's work was provided. The County Board chair made an offer for any and all county facilities under his jurisdiction to assist the charter commission with its work. This meeting was followed about a week later by a separate meeting where the County Board chair was provided with a copy of the most recent departmental committee work involving an organization chart depicting the relationship of current County commission committees and the departments answering to each.

A meeting with Macomb County Treasurer Ted B. Wahby, and his Chief Deputy, Jerry Moffitt, with Commission Chair Femminineo, centered around the operating theory of the charter commission as a broad policymaking body. In a follow-up meeting with the finance-budget committee, Mr. Wahby made a single request for consideration by the charter commissioners. That request was that the county treasurer be permitted a seat, equal voice, and the right to vote, as a member of the county pension board. The logic supporting this is that the office of the county treasurer is constantly involved in investments and investment making decisions. Mr. Wahby offered that by adding this expertise to the pension board, there would be substantial benefit to the methodology of investment decision-making undertaken by this very important county body.

My meeting with County Finance Director Dave Diegel postdated an appearance he made before charter commissioners. Mr. Diegel was kind enough to supply a copy of the county's proposed 2009 budget book. Information from it has been used in

compiling materials forwarded to the charter commissioners for their further reference. Mr. Diegel again restated his strong recommendation that the existing millage rates available to Macomb County be unchanged by the new charter proposal.

A meeting with Corporation Counsel George Brumbaugh yielded a copy of county ordinances which were submitted to the charter commission's general legal counsel for review. Mr. Brumbaugh gave insight into his office operations and provided a synopsis which was later forwarded to the departmental committee for its deliberation.

The Road Commission of Macomb County was visited in three separate meetings held with Road Commissioners Fran Gillett, Robert Sawicki and County Highway Engineer Robert Hoepfner. A brief synopsis of road commission functions were provided for future distribution to the charter commission. (The commission's legal counsel has advised me that their preliminary impression is that the charter act itself may limit the effect of the commissioners' consideration of any change in the county road commission.) The road commissioners and county highway engineer all offered unlimited access and cooperation in any request for information regarding their work.

A meeting with County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh and her Chief Deputy Todd Schmitz focused on the streamlined and apparently seamless operation of the functions of county clerk and register deeds. This coordination reportedly allows servicing a host of other duties, including that of the charter commission, through innovative use of personnel and technology. A secondary discussion was that of potential election dates. It was later confirmed that November 3, 2009 is an acceptable date for the special ballot issue to offer a county charter to the electorate of Macomb County on a general election Day. I would be remiss not to remark on the outstanding level of cooperation the office of the county clerk is providing to the charter commission in its staff, expertise and technology, to conduct commission meetings, committee meetings, post announcements for both, and live stream audio of each on the worldwide web.

In a meeting with Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel, a general overview of the commission's work was provided. The sheriff offered to appear or otherwise make information available should the charter commissioners require additional information on his operations.

A meeting with Macomb Community College President and distinguished economist Jim Jacobs resulted in a generous offer of the facilities of Macomb community college for any public forum the charter commission wishes to conduct. In addition, Mr. Jacobs offered to give the charter commissioners a briefing (10 to 15 minutes) on the critical economic issues facing the county, including his predictions regarding county demographic changes over the next 10 to 20 years. Mr. Jacobs will be contacted for such a presentation on the approval of the charter commission chair.

Following the thought of speaking with those in higher education, a meeting was held with Baker College President Don Torline. Mr. Torline was favorably impressed with the progress described to him on the work the various committees of the charter commission had accomplished. He too, offered facilities of Baker College to facilitate a public forum.

Macomb County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Grace Shore, as a proponent of the charter commission initiative, was most interested in our report on the commission's work. She was very pleased with its progress.

Dr. Albert L. Lorenzo of Oakland University in residence at Macomb Community College, offered a high level of assistance in his review of the most recent work of the departmental committee. Based upon his briefing, Dr. Lorenzo commended the direction in which the charter commission committees appear to be heading.

Dr. Judith Prichert, Superintendent of Centerline Public Schools, was met with Charter Commissioner Wroblewski in attendance. The presentation of the commission's work was met with optimism and a generous offer of the district's state-of-the-art auditorium (capable of seating 750, with full audiovisual facilities) to the commission for a public forum it may wish to conduct an agreed-upon date and time.

In all of the foregoing, a common point of concern mentioned by most, was that they supported strong executive control over day-to-day functions coupled with the authority to make decisions, but subject to checks and balances of a streamlined Board of commissioners for representative oversight.

Recognizing that technical language ("legalese") may not be totally avoided, another common theme mentioned was the recommendation that the commission's work be reduced to a version of the charter proposed containing a set of annotations in plain English for explanation of its content, that content's origin, and its rationale.

Although conducted "behind the scenes" the collaborative efforts of our General Legal Counsel, O'Reilly, Rancilio and Special Legal Counsel, Miller Canfield are remarkable. No less noteworthy is the integration of pro bono Financial Counsel John Axe's insight into matters touching upon his expertise. General Counsel's representative, Attorney Don DeNault and Attorney John Axe have both proven extremely helpful in committee material preparation and answering legal questions posed by the commissioners.

The Charter Commission's Administrative Assistant, Ms. Edie LaBarge, has been maintaining a record of all of the Commission's activities, transmittals and financial dealings, coordinated with numerous county departments and external agencies. Her efforts should ensure a historical chronology of some detail for future reference.

At this writing additional meetings are being scheduled with educators, more Chambers of commerce, special-interest and community groups with at least one further report to the Board of charter commissioners from the undersigned to follow.

Materials reviewed in advancement of the Charter Commission's work exceed two thousand pages of written text. I will be absent without pay the first week of March.

Respectfully submitted,

*Ralph Maccarone*

Ralph "Skip" Maccarone  
Executive Director