

Charter Commission taking shape

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The Charter Commission that will write Macomb County's first constitution started to take shape on Tuesday as primary voters narrowed the field of 151 to a diverse group of 52 nominees.

Those vying for a seat at the table when the "home rule" charter is drafted are running in 26 election districts, of which about 15 lean heavily Republican or strongly Democratic. So, based on the narrowing of the field in Tuesday's primary it's conceivable to look ahead to the November elections and predict who will emerge as charter commissioners in those 15 districts.

That lineup looks like this: a retired auto worker, a sheriff's department sergeant, a Macomb Community College board member, a retired Warren city official, a developer, a bank official, a retired state police command officer, and three attorneys.

Also among the 15 nominees who will be heavily favored in November are: a 20-year-old Republican Party staffer, a retired teacher, a Juvenile Court victim's advocate, a Roseville school board member and a term-limited state representative.

Grace Shore, co-chair of the group that led the drive for a charter/executive government, known as Charter Equals County Executive, lost her bid for a Charter Commission seat. A Macomb Township Republican, Shore finished a disappointing third in the six-candidate GOP race in north Macomb's District 15.

Shore said the lineup of charter commissioner candidates that has emerged on the November general election ballot is wide ranging, but she worries that some have limited qualifications to write a charter.

"They are diverse, but diversity doesn't really speak to their abilities or their political knowledge or the ramifications of the issues they'll face," said Shore, CEO of the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce.

Shore was not the only leader of the pro-executive movement who lost on Tuesday. Several activists in the petition drive that placed the charter/executive issue on the ballot in May went down to defeat, including Shore's fellow co-chair of Charter Equals County Executive, Ron Robinson of Clinton Township.

Two top county officials, Sheriff Mark Hackel and Public Works Commissioner Anthony Marrocco, each had several employees or political allies running for the Charter Commission. Yet, nearly all of those contenders lost.

Marrocco, whose office could be eliminated by the new charter, had an especially rough primary night. His deputy public works commissioner, Gene Schabath, finished last in a four-way race

for the Democratic nod in Sterling Heights' District 7. Marrocco's political action committee had donated \$5,000 to his former secretary, Dolores Thomas, but she finished a distant second in the Democratic primary in Warren's District 4.

The only Marrocco worker nominated was his environmental engineer, Lynne Seymour. She narrowly captured the Republican vote in District 22 (southern Roseville and small portions of Eastpointe and Warren) but has little hope of winning in that heavily Democratic territory in November.

Hackel has said he had no role in influencing employees in his department to run for the Charter Commission. The one employee who won a nomination, **Sgt. David Willis** of Center Line, is considered outside Hackel's inner circle. The sheriff's chief of staff, Anthony Wickersham, finished third in the District 26 (southern Macomb Township) Democratic primary.

The 26-member Charter Commission elected in the fall will, in effect, form a constitutional convention. They will have 180 days to write a charter and present it to voters for approval, probably in August 2009.

The charter will put an elected executive at the helm and could reduce the size of the 26-member Board of Commissioners. The document could also limit taxes and spending, streamline the bureaucracy, establish ethics rules and term limits for officials, and consolidate departments.

Shore said Charter Equals County Executive will continue to speak out during the fall campaign and push for certain issues, such as a much smaller county board.

The field of 151 candidates on Tuesday included numerous current and former politicians and family members of politicians. But the big-name candidates didn't all fare so well.

Notables who won and will advance to November include: former Warren city councilman and county commissioner Lou Burdi; Robert Slavko, former Warren director of public services; former county commissioner Roland Frascchetti; former county commissioner Tom Rombach; state Rep. Daniel Acciavatti; Clinton Township Supervisor Robert Cannon; Roseville school board member Judy Hartwell; Roseville Councilwoman Jan Haggerty; and former Fraser mayor Marilyn Lane.

Prominent candidates who lost charter seats include Robert Chrzanowski, former Macomb County Circuit Court judge; former East Detroit school board member Larry Burton; Eastpointe Councilman Ron Selvidge; former Warren city attorney and current human resources director George Constance; Larry Sauger, brother of county Commissioner Marv Sauger; Jason Davidson of the Clintondale school board; former county commissioner Jim McCarthy; and Frank Vogt, husband of Warren Councilwoman Kathy Vogt.

Voter turnout across the county was 20.8 percent, approximately what was predicted by the county Clerk's Office. That was a disappointment for some political activists who viewed the Charter Commission race as a historic Macomb County vote.

But Tuesday's election was not plagued by a large "fall-off" in Charter Commission voting. There was no dramatic drop-off in voting as voters reached the bottom of the ballot where the Charter Commission candidates -- many of them unknowns -- were listed. In Fraser, for example, 2,404 ballots were cast and 1,728 votes were registered for those running for charter commissioner. In Center Line, 1,337 voters participated and 979 votes were tallied for Charter Commission.

In Mount Clemens, where the Charter Commission race was the only significant contest on the ballot, 2,117 voters cast ballots and 1,826 votes were counted for charter commissioner candidates. In contrast, in Washington Township, where turnout was 33 percent due to an intense race for township supervisor, there were 5,804 voters and 3,616 votes tallied for Charter Commission.