



The Solution Process

How to Achieve a City Charter Amendment in Texas

(A very similar approach is probably appropriate in states other than Texas)

1. Engage the (reduced fee or gratis?) services of a qualified CPA, who is interested in the cause, to assist you in evaluating the apparent financial status of the City.
2. All sizeable US cities presumably prepare the same boilerplate Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) promulgated by the Government Finance Officer Association (the professional body for government finance officers). You and the CPA probably can arrive at a general assessment of the finances of the City just by reading its historical "Changes In Net Assets" and its historical "Ratios Of Outstanding Debt By Type" schedules in the "Statistical Section" of the City's most recent CAFR—similar to pages 196-197 and 212 in the City of Houston 2010 CAFR, accessible from the City Controller Department page on the City of Houston's official website, www.houstontx.gov. You will note that page 197 shows that Houston's "Change in Net Assets" ("Net Loss" in private sector terminology) for FYE 6/30/2010 was \$371,136,000 and page 212 shows General Obligation Bonds outstanding (property tax-supported) soared from \$2,071,560,000 at 6/30/2004 to \$3,395,560,000 at 6/30/2010.
3. After step 2, decide if you wish to achieve a city charter amendment to give voters control over the City's overall finances. If the answer is yes, you and the CPA read [\(CLICK HERE\)](#) and gain a joint understanding of the attached boilerplate [proposed city charter amendment to furnish voter control over the City's overall finances](#).
4. Read the city charter's sections, if any, which deal with term limits and ethics. Read [\(CLICK HERE\)](#) [the attached boilerplate proposed city charter amendments on term limits and ethics](#) and decide if you wish to achieve passage of those two possible city charter amendments.
5. Obtain the (reduced fee or gratis?) services of a qualified attorney who is interested in the cause. Have the attorney determine (may require corresponding with or talking to the office of the state attorney general and the city attorney) what the Texas Local Government Code and the City's charter require as to:
 - a. Establishment of a PAC.
 - b. Election date.
 - c. Necessary wording for petition for charter amendment.
 - d. Number of QUALIFIED AND VERIFIED petition signatures required in order to get the petition on the ballot.
 - e. Time frame for acquiring the petition signatures and formal submission of the petitions to the city secretary or other specified recipient.

- f. Required information on the petition regarding each petition signer and which information must be in the signer's actual handwriting, such as name and date.
 - g. City's procedure for certifying the validity of the petition and its signatures. In submitting the petition signed copies, be sure to allow ample time for the city to verify signatures in time for the issue to be placed on the ballot.
6. Obtain your attorney's approval of all three petitions' wording.
 7. Select a political consultant, if deemed necessary. (There appear to be few who are qualified to run a city charter amendment petition drive.)
 8. Determine the best method to communicate with potential petition signers. In this electronic age, it is possible to obtain electronic lists of those who voted in specified elections. Such data can be used to prepare direct mailings to potential petition signers, having pre-printed out all of the signer's identifying information (except that which is required to be furnished by the signer, such as name and date of signature). Only certain persons have existing programs to manipulate such electronic data. You can mail all three petitions in one envelope and also request email, Facebook or other follow up contact addresses in the cover letter.
 9. Received signed petitions should be kept in easily located filing order, perhaps by voter number or perhaps better by assigned log in sequential number.
 10. A validation review should be made of each petition received, and a running total be maintained of number of signatures validated.
 11. Copies of the signed petitions should be retained, in the same filing order as in 9.
 12. A cover letter should accompany the signed petitions when they are turned in to the City, describing the petitions by their assigned numbering.
 13. You may wish to offer to assist the City in its verification process by permitting the City to use the computer program you have used in your vote gathering and signature validation process. This can be done only with the permission and possibly on site participation by the owner of the computer program. This will probably involve verification against the County's registered voter database.
 14. Now on to the election campaign! Good luck!