

The Sun, Baltimore, Maryland  
The Evening Sun, Baltimore, Maryland  
The Sunday Sun, Baltimore, Maryland

**Vote Against Question J**

by THE BALTIMORE SUN

October 4, 1994 Page(s): 10A

Edition: FINAL

Section: EDITORIAL

Length: 451 words

Biographee: EDITORIAL

Record Number: BSUN341126

---

In 1997, Baltimore will celebrate the bicentennial of its incorporation under a city charter. That basic law has gone through many revisions over the years. On Election Day, Baltimore voters will be asked to vote on the latest proposed changes. We strongly urge that they vote against the charter amendment known as Question J.

When a panel headed by retired Court of Appeals Judge Harry Cole last December published its recommendations to streamline government functions and modernize charter language, most proposals involved minor changes.

There were two exceptions.

The 11-member panel felt that the city comptroller was not the proper official to oversee municipal real estate or to negotiate purchase of insurance. Because both functions dovetail so closely with the responsibilities of the Department of Finance, the commission said it was logical to transfer those specialized responsibilities to that agency.

The highly emotional controversy surrounding then-City Comptroller Jacqueline F. McLean's actions made any sober debate on this proposal impossible. In the end, the City Council, which has several members eyeing the comptroller's seat, rejected the commission's well-reasoned proposal. As a consequence, that change will not be on the ballot. The comptroller's powers remain intact.

If this were the only defect with the charter proposal, it would not be serious. Unfortunately, Question J -- which must be voted up or down in its entirety -- also contains a highly dubious change that, if approved, might endanger Baltimore's orderly planning process.

The city's top planner is currently hired and fired by the Planning Commission. Under the new system, both powers would be given to the mayor. The chief executive's control of the commission would be further strengthened because half of its members would have their terms run concurrently with a mayoral term.

We see these proposed changes as an invitation for trouble. Baltimore's planning director must be assured enough independence

NewsBank, inc.

so that he or she can argue with the politicians about the merits of development schemes without a fear of retaliation.

The Inner Harbor is about to undergo a major expansion; the neighborhoods are changing. By voting against Question J, Baltimoreans can ensure the city's all-important planning office is shielded from undue political pressures.

Tomorrow: City ballot question on term limits.

(Copyright 1994 The Baltimore Sun Company)