

Kingston Council ponders charter changes

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KINGSTON, N.Y. — Kingston lawmakers are considering making revisions to the City Charter that could clear up some inconsistencies and give the Common Council more independence, they said.

Aldерwoman Andrea Shaut told the Common Council's Laws and Rules Committee on Monday that she wanted the group, which she chairs, to consider any Charter changes that could clear up inconsistencies in the document's language and to make sure it supports a system of strong checks and balances. She said she and Alderman-at-large James Noble had been discussing possible changes themselves and she wanted the committee to consider "big picture" amendments.

Shaut added, though, that she is not seeking to change the city's "strong mayor" form of government.

For his part, Noble said he wants the council to consider Charter changes that would enable aldermen to hire their own clerk and legal counsel.

He said when a new administration is elected in the city, there is a potential for the City Clerk and Corporation Counsel to be replaced since both positions serve at the pleasure of the mayor. Aldermen might not want to see that change and so should be able to decide whether the Common Council should hire its own clerk or legal counsel, Noble said.

"It just gives you more independence," Noble said. He said if that change is made, lines would have to be added to the city budget to fund those positions.

The last time the City Charter was amended in its entirety was in 1993.

Shaut, D-Ward 9, said when the Charter was first written it was in support of a city manager form of government. She said it was later quickly changed to a strong mayor format.

"So the charter is a little bit unclear with what the form of government is," Shaut said. She also said Gerald Benjamin, director of the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz, had made some suggestions for possible changes to the Charter, including adding a provision for redistricting the city and for training for elected officials.

Shaut is running for election to the alderman-at-large position to succeed Noble. He has chosen not to seek re-election.