

Support varies for strong-mayor plan

By LYNN HORSLEY
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The Kansas City Council was sharply divided Thursday in its views of Mayor Kay Barnes' strong-mayor proposal, with six members opposing the idea, four supporting it, and two reserving judgment.

The discussion was the first in a formal straw poll by the council since Barnes pitched her idea March 17 to the Charter Review Commission.

Barnes asked the commission to consider replacing the city manager form of government that Kansas City has had since 1925 with a strong-mayor form of government favored by most large U.S. cities.

Councilman Ed Ford, who opposes the change, said he suspects the council won't support a strong-mayor system. He said the council should send that message soon to the commission, before it spends an inordinate amount of time studying the idea.

"There's nothing wrong with the council giving them that guidance," he said.

Ford was joined by council members Becky Nace, Charles Ed- dy, Al Brooks, Bonnie Sue Cooper and Terry Riley in expressing reservations about the strong-mayor idea. Among their concerns were the

Council split on Barnes' proposal

BARNES: Council divided on plan

Continued from B-1

potential abuse of power, the potential for partisan bickering, the staff turnover with each change of administration, and the rush to fix a system that may not be broken.

But Councilman Paul Danaher said he thought the strong-mayor form of government contributed to the success of the nation's most dynamic, progressive cities.

"Look at the cities that have gone light-years ahead of us," Danaher said, citing Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New York, Chicago and Cleveland.

He was joined by Evert Asjes, Teresa Loar and Mary Williams-Neal in supporting further consideration of the strong-mayor idea. Councilmen Troy Nash and Jim Rowland stopped short of stating an opinion, saying they needed to

know more specifics about what Barnes envisions.

Barnes said she didn't want to provide all the details, because she wants the commission to study the best models in the country and make recommendations.

"There are subtleties and nuances in every case," Barnes said.

The commission meets today to hear from some council members and to discuss how to proceed. The council will also continue discussing the topic at a meeting Thursday.

Under Kansas City's current system of government, the mayor is just one among 13 equal council members who pass the laws governing the city. But they don't actually run the city; the city manager and his department heads are responsible for day-to-day management.

Barnes says she gets blamed for the city's problems, but she can't make things happen without more control of city operations.

Under her proposal, the mayor would be the chief executive officer, with the power to hire and fire the city manager and, directly or indirectly, the department heads.

The council would be the legislative body. Any ordinance would need at least seven votes to pass.

But Barnes said it's debatable whether she would have a vote on the council or veto power.

Those are the kinds of details she has said the commission could consider.

The council and voters must approve any charter changes.

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