

Holyoke mayor nixes charter change that would limit his appointment authority

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HOLYOKE — A Home Rule Petition granting the City Council confirmation authority on certain mayoral appoints is all but dead.

Mayor Joshua A. Garcia said on Monday he would not sign the petition to amend the City Charter.

“I don’t plan to sign anything that confirms the changes spelled out in the Home Rule petition, changes that would give the City Council approval authority over some mayoral appointments,” Garcia stated Monday.

While not opposed to modernizing and reforming municipal government, the mayor failed to see how the charter change would improve city services. Home Rule Petitions require the mayor’s signature and legislative approval.

Garcia stated the proposed petition would create situations for micromanagement and introduce city politics into city operations.

“Municipal modernization starts with a strategic discussion with stakeholders. Then, if after a coordinated process the consensus by stakeholders is that adopting these changes will improve municipal services and enhance efficiency,” Garcia noted.

The council sought to change charter language to “shall be appointed by the mayor with city council confirmation,” powers currently vested in the mayor.

The mayoral appointments in the petition included the police chief, Board of Public Works, Fire Commission, Board of Health, City Engineer and Public Works superintendent, appointments vested in the mayor.

Ward 2 Councilor and former acting Mayor Terence Murphy drafted the petition order in the final months of his terms. Though the City Council passed the petition and awaited final legal language from the city’s Law Department, the petition went unsigned.

Ward 3 David Bartley introduced the petition’s legal form at last week’s City Council meeting. Several newer councilors, including Councilor At-large Tessa Murphy-Romboletti, said they would not vote until they understood the intentions of the petition.

Bartley asked to table the order for further consideration. During discussions, Councilor At-large Joseph M. McGiverin doubted if Garcia would sign such an order, one diminishing the executive branch’s appointment power.

“There exists a menu of practices we need to go over and see how we can work together with the council and the community to bring about municipal modernization designed to improve services and reduce harm and liability,” Garcia stated.

The mayor looked forward to discussions with the newly formed Government Reform Advisory Council.

The last Home Rule Petition approved by the legislature allowed the City Council to appoint any councilor as acting Mayor. In late March, Mayor Alex B. Morse resigned his seat after accepting the town manager job in Provincetown.

Council President Todd McGee could serve only two weeks as acting Mayor after Morse’s departure. So the council elected Murphy to cover Morse’s final seven months in office. Garcia underwent two swearing-in ceremonies, the first shortly after the Nov. 2 election and the other in January for the whole, four-year term.