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Charter work suits August well

By MITCHELL L. MOSS

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Opponents of City Charter reform are upset; they're used to spending August out of town. Now Mayor Bloomberg's Charter Revision Commission is holding hearings on mayoral succession and nonpartisan elections, and, unhappy at the prospect of working this month, the good-government groups are claiming there's not enough time.

This year's commission admittedly has a tight time frame. But it follows the timetable of previous years. In 1989, when the current Charter was written, the hearings took place in August, albeit after extensive research and work - but, then again, the entire structure of government was being changed. This year, only mayoral succession and nonpartisan elections are being addressed.

Determining who should succeed the mayor and when a mayoral election should be held are legitimate issues for the electorate to decide in November. More time will not clarify the choices.

On nonpartisan elections, it's worth noting that most cities do not rely on political parties to nominate candidates. In fact, only 182 of the 1,505 members of the National League of Cities have partisan elections. So there is no shortage of experience to draw upon. What we do know is that the majority of New York's local elections are determined through partisan political primary contests.

So, why all the fuss? The commission has no choice but to work now to meet the September deadline for submitting Charter amendments to the Board of Elections. Should we wait till October, when the focus is the World Series? Or Thanksgiving? Or, should reform hearings be postponed till cold weather and snow make it tough for people to attend?

August is the best time to digest Charter reform. The days are long, so people don't mind attending hearings and it's possible to get media attention, and there are plenty of New Yorkers around. So, let the commission work now so the voters can decide what they want in November. Putting the proposals on the ballot doesn't change the Charter, it just gives the voters the right to decide - something they're more than capable of doing.

In this 2-4/7 world, it makes more sense to postpone vacation plans than to postpone efforts to improve our city government.

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