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Fairfax Decides to Try Again for City Charter

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Staff Reporter

Amid dismay over prospects of revised annexation laws from Richmond, the Fairfax Board of County Supervisors yesterday agreed to try again for a standby city charter.

The charter, a redraft of the plan that failed in the Virginia General Assembly two years ago, would be the ultimate weapon in the County's three-pronged legislative battle to win better legal defenses against fragmentation.

It was endorsed by a 6-to-1 vote despite several members' serious reservations about the merits of the 400-square-mile County moving down the road toward city status.

These reservations were overcome, in part, by information that the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council's annexation law proposals—still a closely guarded secret in Richmond—would do little to dispel Fairfax's fears.

The Supervisors learned informally that one of the VALC's proposals would clear the way for prompt refiling of Alexandria's most recent suit seeking to annex part of Fairfax, which was withdrawn in 1961.

Doubt Exists

Localities presently are barred from seeking to annex twice within five years, but there is doubt over what happens in the case of a withdrawn suit.

Alexandria has been pushing hard for this clarification and, as early as last March, indicated its annexation plans were shelved only temporarily.

Because of the Alexandria threat and possible moves by Fairfax City and the Town of Vienna, there is a "compelling need" for the Assembly to grant a standby charter this year, said Supervisor Frederick A. Babson Jr., who proposed its adoption. The only opponent was Chairman Stuart T. DeBell.

The charter, if approved by the Assembly, would be on hand for submission to a County-wide vote if any serious annexations or incorporations threatened.

No Major Changes

Unlike a charter draft prepared last year by a citizens committee, the 1962 redraft would make no major changes in the organization of Fairfax government. The other draft calling for a strong mayor form of government, was received coolly by the Board.

The charter will be the County's third choice in case two other proposals fail. The

favored alternatives are amendments to the urban county form of government urged by the League of Virginia Counties and an extension of the 1962-64 moratorium on annexations and incorporations.

While other VALC revisions in annexation laws caused little cheer in Fairfax, the Supervisors welcomed a provision reportedly barring new incorporations of towns in populous counties.

Population Criterion

The Supervisors also understood the VALC would raise the minimum population required for city status—from 5000 to 10,000 for second-class cities and from 10,000 to 25,000 for first-class cities.

Changes in the annexation statutes were described as primarily procedural, making it more difficult to proceed with frivolous suits.

Proposed clarifications of the consolidation statutes would not affect the prohibition against merger of counties and towns into cities. Fairfax and the tiny town of Clifton were rebuffed by the courts in 1961 when they attempted such a move.