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## Newton favors status quo in charter talks

By CHARLES PATTON

Passo Times Staff Writer

**DADE CITY** — Pasco County Circuit Court Clerk Miller Newton told charter commission members Wednesday that he favors continued election of constitutional officers and that he leans toward the appointed administrator system.

He said he also opposes a Civil Service-type employment system for constitutional offices.

The charter commission is interviewing all elected officials in the county in an effort to learn how the current system of government operates and to hear ideas for improvement.

Newton said he favors election of constitutional officers because it provides good system of checks and balances and minimizes bureaucracy.

**APPOINTMENT OF** office holders tends to do away with the voice of the people and encourages abuses of the system, he contended.

"Professional bureaucrats are the result of giving up control," Newton said. "Giving up control is dangerous. The time has come to put local government back into the hands of the people

as much as possible. I favor election of officials whenever possible.

Newton said he leans toward an appointed rather than elected administrator, but has no strong feelings for either system. He said the decision is based on whether the County Commission wishes to continue its dual role as both administrative and legislative head of county government or relinquish the administrative role.

He said he fears that an elected executive would put the County Commission in the same posture that the School Board recently faced with an elected administrator who was reluctant to implement board wishes.

Newton said he opposes centralized hiring of employees for both county administrative and constitutional jobs.

**"MY PEOPLE ARE** technicians rather than just clerks," he said. "The varied functions of this office require that people with specialized skills be employed."

He told the charter study group that since he is legally accountable under state law for errors in his office, whether made by himself or an employee, "There is no way central personnel is going to hire my people."

Elected officials should do their own hiring and firing to maintain the degree of accountability necessary to function properly, the clerk said.

He said he opposes a Civil Service-type of employment system in the county because of "featherbedding."

"It has gotten to the point where it takes five people at the state level to do a job that one person could do," Newton declared. "It takes 10 to do the same job at the federal level."

Newton said his office provides 120 different services in three general categories — record keeping, finances and checks and balances.

**HE SAID IT** might be possible for some "ministerial" duties — services carried out for someone else — to be handled at a level other than in the clerk's office. But he strongly defended the clerk's role as a fiscal agent for providing the day-to-day checks and balances on governmental expenditures and court services.

Newton said he would argue against efforts to appoint or elect a comptroller for Pasco County.

He said an appointed comptroller would not provide the

checks and balances necessary to assure taxpayers that their money is not being spent foolishly.

He said the county is not yet large enough for an elected comptroller's office.

Only through joint handling of a number of functions would a comptroller's office, with the number of skilled personnel it would require, be economically feasible in Pasco County, Newton said.

**THE CLERK SAID** he also is opposed to merging of the clerk's and tax collector's offices.

Although both deal with taxpayers' money, he said the two jobs are at opposite poles. He compared the tax collector's role to that of a sales clerk and the clerk's to that of a bookkeeper.

"The collector operates the cash register and the clerk keeps the books," Newton said. "It's just another example of the old system of checks and balances."

Newton said that while a number of changes in the make-up of governmental operation are possible, he urged that the charter commission "adhere itself in great detail to financial responsibility."

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=u49IAAAAIBAJ&sjid=VXkDAAAIBAJ&pg=7253,1663580&dq=miller-newton+election&hl=en>