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Kelton blocks charter plan from agenda

By CHARLES PATTON and JAN GLIDEWELL
Pasco Times Staff Writers

NEW PORT RICHEY

Pasco County Administrator Richard Kelton refused Friday to place the proposed new county charter on the agenda of next Tuesday's County Commission meeting as requested by the charter commission.

The charter commission, at the same time, presented the document to Circuit Clerk Miller Newton at the courthouse in Dade City. Newton serves as clerk to the County Commission.

William Webb, vice chairman of the charter commission, and Executive Director John Mica contended that this action starts the clock on a 90-day time period in which the County Commission must call a referendum on the charter.

STATE LAW requires the County Commission to call a referendum no sooner than 45 days

Kelton, at a press conference Friday afternoon, said he intends to delay giving the charter to the County Commission until Dec. 16. He said this would give the County Commission the option of having the referendum coincide with the March 9 presidential preference primary election or of having the referendum before the primary.

If the charter were received by the County Commission next Tuesday — as the charter commission has requested — the 90-day deadline would expire about 13 days before the presidential primary.

THE CHARTER commission has indicated that it would prefer a referendum on the charter in mid-February.

Kelton said it would cost \$20,000 to have a special election before the primary. He said the County Commission should have the option of deciding whether to spend this money.

ing with presentation of the charter to the County Commission does not specify whether the receiving agent is the clerk or some other agent designated by the commission; the administrator's action is proper.

KELTON AND Rynders cited the rules of procedure of the Board of County Commissioners and the county administrator ordinance.

The administrator ordinance gives Kelton the duties of preparing the agenda. The administrative code gives him the discretion of holding any item for 21 days before placing it on the agenda.

Peter Dunbar, former county attorney and current charter commission chairman, attended Kelton's press conference and subsequently conducted his own conference.

DUNBAR SAID WEBB and Mica filed the document with Newton's office on the advice of John Lawson, the charter commission's attorney. Lawson could not be reached for comment.



Kelton (left) called his decision 'purely administrative.'

Dunbar (right) called the move 'a very arbitrary action.'

Charter from Page 1

Dunbar said the charter writers want a separate vote on the charter — rather than including it with other ballot questions — to keep the charter from being overshadowed by other issues.

Kelton said he believes that expenditures of public funds should be the decision of the elected county commissioners rather than the appointed charter commission members.

HE SAID HIS DECISION was "purely administrative" and does not indicate favorable or unfavorable reaction to the proposed charter by his office or the County Commission.

Kelton said he had not been told by any of the county commissioners to take such action. He

said the commission could overrule his decision, and could consider the charter Tuesday.

He said that even with his 21-day delay the County Commission could decide to set the election before the presidential primary. His action will preserve the County Commission's various options on the matter, he said.

DUNBAR SAID A majority of the charter commission members plan to attend Tuesday's County Commission session at Port Richey City Hall.

Dunbar called Kelton's action a "very arbitrary action by an appointed official." He said it typifies one of the situations that the charter com-

mission wants to change in county government.

Dunbar said he believes that the charter commission feels strongly that placing the question on the primary ballot would create a "smoke screen" and would cloud the issue.

HE SAID HE CANNOT go so far as to say court litigation of the question will be sought. That decision will have to be made by a majority of the members of the charter commission, he said.

Dunbar said it is the feeling of the charter commission that coupling of the document with the presidential primary "really, really cheats the people from making an affirmative decision" on the proposal.