Home rule agreement still eludes city officials

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Rapid City officials continued to wrangle late Monday night over the composition of a committee that would study home rule as a form of government.

The proposed committee has yet to meet and would have little power beyond giving a report on its findings. But it has been discussed extensively by city and Pennington County officials since Alderman Ed McLaughlin first proposed it several months ago.

Alderman Carole Hillard asked Monday night that the Rapid City Common Council endorse an action by the Pennington County Commission that would allow the county to appoint 17 representatives to the committee.

But Mayor Keith Carlyle said three county commissioners contacted him Monday and asked that the council not act on the county's request.

The county commission voted 2-1 on Aug. 15 to nominate 17 representatives to the committee. Commissioners then said they wanted to appoint five of the 17 themselves, have five more picked by the other elected county officials, and have seven more members nominated by other cities and organized townships in the county.

Commissioners Shirley Alexander and Louis Freiberg voted for the motion, and Commissioner Cheryl Kandaras voted against it.

Carlyle said Kandaras and Commissioners Paul Ness and Van Loan called him Monday to ask that the council not act on the county's request. He said commissioners wanted to discuss the issue again at their next meeting.

Despite Carlyle's protests, the common council voted 7-3 to go along with the county on its desire to increase its representation on the committee.

McLaughlin originally proposed that the committee have 10 people appointed by the common council and 10 by the county commission. He said Monday night that the county commissioners, other elected officials and outlying areas could be represented by 10 people as well as they could be by 17.

Rapid City has a larger population than the rest of the county, so the rest of the county should not have a greater representation on the home-rule study committee, McLaughlin said.

But Alderman Gale Holbrook said the issue was one of public relations with our trade area.

"Those seven areas (which the county's additional seven people would represent) come to our area to trade," Holbrook said. "I certainly would not want to send a message to them that they're not wanted."

Before the home-rule study committee was proposed, Mayor Keith Carlyle had wanted city and county officials to appoint a home-rule charter commission. The commission would have had the power to draw up a home-rule charter and bring it to the vote of the people.

Carlyle said home rule could be used to combine Rapid City and Pennington County government, promoting efficiency and saving money for taxpayers.

But his idea did not receive enough support, and in June Carlyle said appointing a home-rule charter commission would be premature.

"There are too many negative connotations with that word home rule," he said on June 21.