

13 March 2010

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Mayor Euille and members of City Council,

I want to thank Councilmember Hughes for bringing the issue of changing the municipal election process back into the public forum. It seems that since the Hobson Commission, the issue has primarily been a matter for council members to discuss, rising to the level of a public hearing only when a legislative deadline is near.

I strongly urge the members of council to adopt the resolution as proposed by Councilmember Hughes. One persistent problem in all the discussions thus far about changing the municipal election process has been the lack of definitive, verified information as to what the voters want. The vast majority of statements and positions have been based on the personal opinions and anecdotal facts from a motivated but definite minority of the voters.

I also strongly urge the council members in their discussion of today's docket item # 8.1 to state the degree to which they are willing to abide by the preferences expressed by the voters. After all, if council is going to ignore the referendum results, then why bother.

Assuming this referendum is passed, I ask the Hobson Commission to carefully draft a sufficient number of referendum questions so that the voter-preferred, essential framework of a new municipal election process can be ascertained.

And finally, after the referendum results are in, I ask that sufficient public workshops be held to ensure that the new municipal election process is as free of unintended consequences as possible.

As an example of unintended consequences I refer to the four-year, staggered term proposal. In the year that would include the election of the mayor, we would have three council members with two more years on their terms, but who might want to run for mayor. If we allow them to run, then depending on the details, every four years we have the prospect for several months with a potentially deadlocked six-member council, and having to hold a special election that will cost additional money and have poor turnout. Although it is a common problem, discussed and decided in other jurisdictions, as far as I know, we in Alexandria have never even considered this complication, at least not in a public forum.

But such discussions are hopefully in the future. One we can only reach if city council first adopts the resolution as proposed, and states its willingness to accept and follow the will of the voters. I request that today you start us down the path that leads to a legislative package sent to Richmond that represents more than a supermajority of city council. Let it embody the will of the voters of Alexandria.

Sincerely,
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