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*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** FEBRUARY 12, 2008  
**TO:** THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
**CC:** JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER  
**FROM:** MAYOR WILLIAM D. EUILLE & COUNCILMAN JUSTIN M. WILSON  
**SUBJECT:** ELECTION REFORM

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The mission adopted by the City Council on September 14, 2004 states that successful government is one that “engages the entire community as it plans for the future<sup>1</sup>.” The most basic symptom of community engagement is participation in the electoral process.

Over the past 30 years, that civic engagement, as measured by the percentage of residents participating in our municipal elections, has steadily declined<sup>2</sup>, from 41% in 1976 to 19% in 2006.

In 1992, the City Council expressed concern over the reduction in turnout among voters in municipal elections. At the time, a committee was appointed consisting of George Cook, Mike Holm, Myke Reid, Jack Ticer, Nancy Cox, William Hurd, and Sandra Murphy.

In April of 1993, the Committee provided their report<sup>3</sup> to City Council—recommending three changes:

- Decreasing the number of elections by electing City Council members to four-year terms
- Changing the time of City Council elections to the fall
- Making it more convenient to vote by increasing the number of polling places

In March of 2007, again in response to concerns regarding reductions in turnout, the Mayor appointed a new committee to study the issue—this time consisting of Richard Hobson, Becky Davies, Robert Calhoun, Christopher Campagna, Lynnwood Campbell, William Cleveland, Iris Henley, Anna Leider, and Joyce Woodson.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Alexandria, “Mayor and City Council, 2004-2015 Strategic Plan.” Adopted September 14, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Turnout in 1976 was 41%, 1979 was 39%, 1982 was 37%, 1985 was 36%, 1988 was 34%, 1991 was 30%, 1994 was 29%, 1997 was 24%, 2000 was 25%, 2003 was 27%, 2006 was 19%.

<sup>3</sup> Ad Hoc Committee on Election Procedures, “Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Election Procedures.” April 14, 1993.

In June of 2007, the Committee provided their report<sup>4</sup> to the City Council—making three recommendations:

- That the current process for Council and School Board elections not be changed
- That the Council and the School Board each have sufficient authority to decide if a pay raise for a future Council or School Board, respectively, is warranted (the process called for under current law), and see no need for this Committee to make any such recommendation.
- That the citizens of Alexandria are better served if the Mayor and Council have adequate staff assistance, and we recommend that each Council member have a Fulltime aide (each member currently has a half-time aide); also recommend that staff assistance for the Mayor be increased by the equivalent of a half-time person (the Mayor currently has the equivalent of one full-time aide).

Both the 1992/1993 and the 2007 committees grappled with a similar set of issues, including:

- Changing the municipal elections from May to November
- Changes in the length of City Council terms
- Staggering the election of City Council members
- Creation of wards/districts for the election of City Council members
- Transition to non-partisan elections for City Council
- Changes to compensation for the City Council

Of these listed changes, City Council has the authority today to accomplish a change in the election from May to November, and a change in compensation for the City Council. The remaining changes that were discussed by the two committees would require a change to the City Charter, and the concurrence of the General Assembly and the Governor.

The Code of Virginia<sup>5</sup> prescribed that a City might change its elections to November by the adoption of an ordinance by the City Council or by the submission of signatures to the Circuit Court requesting a binding referendum.

Subsequent to the receipt of the 2007 report, the City Council chose to appoint two members of the Council to formulate recommendations based on the 2007 report. As those designees, and in recognition of the significant community interest in this issue, we have the following recommendations to our colleagues:

- 1) That City Council adopts a resolution addressed to the Alexandria Circuit Court, requesting an advisory referendum to appear on the ballot on November 4, 2008, containing the question: "Should the Alexandria City Council consider and adopt

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Hobson, Chair, "Report of the Committee Created to Review the Election Process for the Alexandria City Council and the School Board." June 21, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Code of Virginia. Section 24.2-222.1. Amended 2002.

an ordinance to change the election date of the Mayor, members of the City Council and members of the School Board from the May general election to the November general election cycle?"

- 2) If the November referendum is successful, an ordinance to move municipal elections to November shall be introduced at the Tuesday November 11, 2008 Legislative Meeting, and scheduled for public hearing and adoption at the Saturday November 15, 2008 Public Hearing.
- 3) At the November 15, 2008 Public Hearing, the City Council shall solicit input as to additional changes to our elections that may be required.
- 4) At the November 25, 2008 Legislative Meeting, the City Council shall adopt a resolution including any desired changes to the City Charter. That resolution shall be forwarded to the City's General Assembly delegation for introduction during the 2009 General Assembly session.
- 5) If changes to the City Charter are requested, City Council shall hold the required public hearing at the December 13, 2008 Public Hearing.

cc: Ignacio Pessoa, City Attorney  
Bernard Caton, Legislative Director  
The Alexandria School Board  
Mary LaMois, Secretary, Alexandria Electoral Board  
Senator Patsy Ticer  
Senator Richard Saslaw  
Delegate Brian Moran  
Delegate Adam Ebbin  
Delegate David Englin

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_

**WHEREAS**, Section 24.2-222.1 of the Code of Virginia authorizes the Alexandria City Council, by ordinance, to change the election date of the Mayor, members of the City Council and members of the School Board from the May general election cycle to the November general election cycle; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 3.13 of the Alexandria City Charter provides that the City Council has the authority to submit any proposed ordinance, question or issue to the qualified voters of the City for an advisory referendum; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 3.13 of the City Charter and Section 24.2-684 of the Code of Virginia further provide (1) that any such advisory referendum be initiated by resolution of the City Council, addressed to the Circuit Court of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and (2) that, if the request is found by the Court to be in proper order, the Court shall order the advisory referendum election to be held in within a reasonable time and on a date in conformance with state law; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 24.2-682(A) of the Code of Virginia permits such advisory referendum election to be held on the same day as a general election; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council has concluded that it is necessary and desirable to submit to the qualified voters of the City an advisory referendum on the question of whether the City Council should change the election date of the Mayor, members of the City Council and members of the School Board from the May general election cycle to the November general election cycle; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council has concluded that such advisory referendum question should be placed on the ballot at the November 4, 2008 general election, in order that as many qualified voters as possible participate in the referendum election;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the City Council does hereby request that the Circuit Court of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, order and direct that the following advisory referendum question be submitted to the qualified voters of the City at the November 4, 2008 general election:

Should the Alexandria City Council consider and adopt an ordinance to change the election date of the Mayor, members of the City Council and members of the School Board from the May general election to the November general election cycle?

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the City Council does hereby direct the City Clerk to attest, and the City Attorney to file this resolution with the Circuit Court, in the manner provided by law.

ADOPTED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
WILLIAM D. EUILLE,                      MAYOR

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jacqueline M. Henderson, CMC, City Clerk

12  
4-12-08

Testimony on Docket Item 12.

I am Katy Cannady. I live at 20 East Oak Street.

There's only one reason advanced for changing the date for City Council and school board elections – that it would increase turnout. Even this seemingly logical assumption has flaws.

I spent my childhood in Texas politics. It was the family hobby and I was addressing envelopes by age 10. In those days Texas had what was called a “bed sheet ballot.” It still does. Every office, every state judgeship, jobs that might reasonably be considered as civil service posts – all are elective. Politically active people like my parents spent their time trying to get people to cast ballots in those races. There would be various sample ballots circulating at each election.

I clearly remember an election day during my teens when my father, on his way out the door to drive little old ladies to the polls, said “I’ve left a marked ballot by the telephone; tell anyone who calls how to vote.” And I did tell several people how to vote that day. They accepted my choices when I wasn’t old enough to vote just because I was answering my father’s phone. People who vote bed sheets ballots are not well informed voters. It’s possible to collect good information on only so many candidates at any one election.

Add up 14 candidates for City Council and 18 candidates for school board in addition to candidates for state and national office and Alexandria will have its own bed sheet ballot. Not only will we have created a less involved electorate, but it will be an electorate which will not vote in every race. Just as in Texas, until this day, people will vote the state and national offices where candidates are covered by the mass circulation newspapers and the local network television stations and ignore the rest of the ballot. With this change we will have lost something valuable, the fairly well informed, interested electorate that votes in the spring, and we will have gained only a less than expected number of new voters.

If this weren’t a good enough reason not to change the election time for City Council, there’s the matter of the sheer unpredictability of changes in election law. In 1960 a change in the Texas election law set in motion the events that took Texas from majority Democratic to majority Republican. Here in Alexandria well meaning citizens genuinely believed that if we elected the school board by wards, we would have more diversity than if they were elected at large. It seemed a logical idea at the time, but we’ve elected several school boards since the ward system began. Each and every nine-member school board has been less diverse than the seven-member Council elected at large at the same election.

Changing the likely electorate will certainly mean that candidates running for City Council will find themselves campaigning on broader, simpler themes. I predict that city taxes will be a bigger issue in every election, not just during hard times.

If you run in the fall, competing for attention with state and national candidates, you will all have to spend more to make yourselves known. I do not welcome even more money in our electoral system. I think campaigns are too expensive as it is.

If you take the position that we must have more participation in the general election, then you can not logically support allowing the party candidates to be chosen in unassembled caucuses, held at only one location in the city. I don't believe the turnout at any one caucus has ever been much more than two thousand voters. We will have to have a citywide primary and that will be an extra expense to the taxpayers.

Finally scheduling a referendum on changing the Election Day at the same time as the Presidential election is just unacceptable. It guarantees that there will be no public debate on a change that could have far reaching effects, effects that we can not predict. If I were a cynic, I'd think you were trying to sneak this change in when people aren't paying attention.

12  
4-12-08



Sanford Horn  
<sdhwrites@comcast.net>

04/10/2008 04:49 PM

Please respond to  
Sanford Horn  
<sdhwrites@comcast.net>

To <alexvamayor@aol.com>, <timothylovain@aol.com>,  
<councilmangaines@aol.com>, <council@krupicka.com>,  
<delpepper@aol.com>, <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>,  
cc

bcc

Subject COA Contact Us: April 12 Hearing - Election Day Potential Date  
Change

Time: [Thu Apr 10, 2008 16:49:45] IP Address: [76.21.178.244]

**Issue Type:** Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members

**First Name:** Sanford

**Last Name:** Horn

**Street Address:** 722 Carpenter Road

**City:** Alexandria

**State:** VA

**Zip:** 22314-6226

**Phone:** 703-567-7709

**Email Address:** sdhwrites@comcast.net

**Subject:** April 12 Hearing - Election Day Potential Date Change  
To the Mayor and Members of the Alexandria City Council:

Please enter

the attached into the record at this Saturday's (April 12) public hearing,  
as well as read it yourselves. This is a copy of my column in opposition to  
the potential of moving May local elections to November.

**Comments:**

I am unable to

deliver my comments in person as Saturday is my Sabbath.

Thank

you,

Sanford D. Horn

**Attachment:** 5352ea84b2c34fd8037b08aaa8b9de5a.doc



5352ea84b2c34fd8037b08aaa8b9de5a.doc



Keep Local Elections In May  
Commentary by Sanford D. Horn  
April 6, 2008

Run, don't walk to City Hall this Saturday, April 12 for the City Council Public Hearing. The most important docket item is a resolution requesting a referendum to appear on the November ballot moving City Council and School Board elections from May to November.

As a former candidate for the School Board, I strongly support the retention of May local elections, for although I was on record disparaging the pathetically paltry – 19 percent – turnout, at least the candidates found themselves center stage.

Let's dispel the notion that moving local elections to November would increase turnout. Sure, more citizens may cast votes in November, but by adding the City Council and School Board races to a ballot that may include presidential, senate, congressional candidates one year, and governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, state senate and house of delegate candidates another year, local candidates will simply receive less attention than they deserve.

Most voters are already under the misguided impression that the higher ranking office the more influential it is in our lives. Quite the contrary. The president represents over 300 million Americans before the global community. Members of the House of Representatives represent approximately 650,000 citizens. When someone's Social Security check has been inexplicably delayed, they don't call the White House, they call their Congressman.

On the state level, the governor in Richmond is not called to report a pothole, instead City Hall is contacted. Retaining May for local elections is vital for voters to become familiar with the candidates and the candidates to spend time hearing the concerns of their potential constituents.

Governance at the most local level is the most effective. Elected leaders are closer to their constituents, live in the same neighborhoods and are affected by the same issues. Moving local elections to November where the candidates and the issues can be lost within the shuffle of the seemingly more "important" offices will allow the majority party to become complacent, and responsibility and accountability to the voters would, in essence, disappear.

This is not a Democrat versus Republican issue. Instead this is a non-partisan issue that should give the voters a serious level of consternation. Even the League of Women Voters has expressed concern with the potential date amendment.

The school board, for example is a non-partisan body and deserves as much attention as can be mustered. With a currently ineffective school board, wasting tax-payer dollars hiring, then firing a search committee to lure a new superintendent to Alexandria, it is imperative that that board be held accountable for their irresponsible actions. (But more on that issue in another column.)

Those unable to attend the April 12 hearing due to religious observance, contact the City Council at 703-838-4500 or via the City website at [www.alexandriava.gov](http://www.alexandriava.gov).

*Sanford D. Horn is a writer and political consultant living in Alexandria.*



Joseph Ludvigson

~~j.ludvigson@hotmail.com~~

04/10/2008 12:38 PM

Please respond to  
Joseph Ludvigson

~~j.ludvigson@hotmail.com~~

To <alexvamayor@aol.com>, <timothylovain@aol.com>,  
<councilmangaines@aol.com>, <council@krupicka.com>,  
<delpepper@aol.com>, <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>,

cc

bcc

Subject COA Contact Us: Opposition to moving municipal elections date

12  
4-12-08

Time: [Thu Apr 10, 2008 12:38:53] IP Address: [REDACTED]

**Issue Type:** Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members

**First Name:** Joseph

**Last Name:** Ludvigson

**Street Address:** 266 Medlock Lane

**City:** Alexandria

**State:** VA

**Zip:** 22304

**Phone:** 703-212-8719

**Email Address:** ~~j.ludvigson@hotmail.com~~

**Subject:** Opposition to moving municipal elections date  
Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor and City Council:

I strongly oppose the Council's efforts to move municipal elections from May to November. I strikes me as counterproductive. Why on earth would you want to make it easier for those people to vote who don't care enough about our local city issues to cast a ballot in May, but will do so in November because there are more high-profile (i.e. TV-propogated) issues and individuals on the ballot? We should not be encouraging people to vote on local issues when they don't care enough to educate themselves and make a concerted effort to turn out to vote on those issues. This is a cynical ploy by the City Council to preserve its power at the expense of good local government. Whether such decision is being made for partisan reasons or for personal gain, I do not know; however, I do know that it is bad government, and I strongly oppose it. Furthermore, I will strongly oppose any member of your body who votes in favor of such change, and I will work to ensure that my neighbors do the

**Comments:**

same when you re-election time comes.

Thank

you.

Respectfully,

J.P. Ludvigson

12  
4-12-08

Robert L Calhoun  
3204 Circle Hill Road  
Alexandria, Virginia 22305

April 10, 2008

The Honorable Mayor and Members of the Alexandria City Council  
City Hall  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: Change in City Council Elections (Item 12 )

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of Council:

Since I cannot be present at the public hearing on this item this Saturday, I am offering these comments as to you both as a member of the Committee appointed by Mayor Euille to examine this issue and as a former member of Council.

The major impetus for the formation of the Committee and its charge was an expressed concern over low turnouts in recent Council elections. To counter this trend, the Committee was asked to consider changing the current May election cycle to the November general election cycle as is permitted by current law and has already been undertaken by several Virginia cities.

In addition to its own deliberations, the Committee held a public hearing which was well attended with the comments being generally substantive. Most striking was a general lack of enthusiasm and opposition to changing the election cycle to the Fall. As you are aware, the Committee did not support this change and, indeed, did not recommend any structural changes in the electoral process.

Changing the Council election cycle to the Fall has a certain appeal; however, the principal argument made for larger turnouts is not by itself a persuasive reason to make this change. As several speakers at the Committee's public hearing pointed out, we do not really know why voter turnout in Council elections is markedly lower than Presidential elections—a pattern that is common around the State. Several reasons can be speculated: (1) in a City with many renters and transients, voters do not “identify” with Alexandria and its government; (2) voters feel that it “makes no difference” or, conversely, feel that they have nothing at stake or at risk; or (3) lack of meaningful competition. Most voters I have discussed these issues with believe that the City is most of the time well-governed and are not moved to make sharp changes in the Council. Most informed voters are also aware that with single-party domination in City politics, the general election is less meaningful. Several speakers at the Committee's public hearing pointed out that the important election process is


the 1600 or so people who choose to vote in a party caucus.

Making a change to the Fall on the hopeful assumption that it will increase voter participation does not change any of these factors, and may result in a sacrifice of other values. Low turnouts or not, those who do vote in City elections are afforded an opportunity to focus on City and School issues without the message being buried in the larger noise of a federal or state election having different issues and concerns. It can safely be assumed that Council and School Board campaigns, which are already too expensive, will get more so. Candidates, emphasising City issues, may find them tugging for attention and having to debate issues that have little or nothing to do with the future of the City or its governance. I have trouble visualising a candidate's night with 14 or so Council candidates sharing the platform with candidates or surrogates for President and/ or Congress.

If increasing turnouts is important, there are possible options for the Council to consider that would not have these consequences. Several of these were raised at the public hearing and considered but not adopted by the Committee. They include modifying the present at-large system to a district or a modified district system, or staggering the terms. Both of these options are used in other Virginia cities.

All things considered, I would leave things as they are. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

  
Robert L. Calhoun



christine gunderson  
<christine@gunderson.net>

04/10/2008 07:05 PM

Please respond to  
christine gunderson  
<christine@gunderson.net>

To <alexvamayor@aol.com>, <timothylovain@aol.com>,  
<councilmangaines@aol.com>, <council@krupicka.com>,  
<delpepper@aol.com>, <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>,  
cc

bcc

Subject COA Contact Us: moving municipal elections from may to nov

12  
4-12-08

Time: [Thu Apr 10, 2008 19:05:29] IP Address: [68.50.197.229]

**Issue Type:** Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members  
**First Name:** christine  
**Last Name:** gunderson  
**Street Address:** 827 wolfe street  
**City:** ALEXANDRIA  
**State:** va  
**Zip:** 22314  
**Phone:** 703-824-4837  
**Email Address:** christine@gunderson.net  
**Subject:** moving municipal elections from may to nov  
I'd like to register my opposition to a proposal to move municipal  
elections from May to November. Municipal issues and local elections are  
important yet they get little attention and media coverage, making it  
difficult for voters to make informed decisions.  
If these issues are put  
**Comments:** before voters in November when state and federal issues are also on the  
ballot they will not receive the attention, public debate and discussion  
they deserve.  
Thanks for your time.  
Sincerely,  
Christine Gunderson



a fish  
<afsuper2000@yahoo.com>

04/08/2008 06:17 PM

To bill euille <wmeuille@wdeuille.com>, <delpepper@aol.com>  
cc rob krupicka <council@krupicka.com>, tim lovain  
<timothylovain@aol.com>, <councilmagaines@aol.com>, paul  
smedberg <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>, justin wilson  
bcc

Subject Election Reform

12  
4-12-08

Dear Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Pepper and members of Council:

On Saturday, April 12th, you will be having a public discussion regarding a resolution to change the election of the Mayor, Council and School Board Members to November. Since a bi-partisan task force was appointed by the Mayor, a public hearing was held in June, '07 to discuss the findings and recommendations of that task force which were accepted and it is clear that you all need to respect the recommendations of that task force as well as the public input. No one says that "life is fair" and we don't always like the outcomes on issues of importance as well as the results of elections at the local, state and federal level. However, as adults we must accept the results and outcomes. It is important for all of you to put aside your personal political agendas and listen to the people. For those of you who have children, you know what to do when they start having "temper tantrums" because they don't always get what they want.

The task force was not asked to show why voter turn-out is low when local elections are held in Alexandria. However, what was the general consensus, was to keep the election for Mayor, Council and School Board as is and not to make any changes.

As such, I am requesting that the election process not be changed to November and that you all as our elected members of council need to accept the decision made last June by the Election Task Force and those of us who spoke at the public hearing. Unfortunately, you all refused to accept the recommendations of the Transportation Task force which worked for almost 4 yrs. in developing a good plan and you all went ahead to make changes without any public input to satisfy your own personal political agendas. This issue is no different.

The people have spoken, the bi-partisan task force appointed by the Mayor did their job and you all now have to accept the results as adults.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Annabelle Fisher

You rock. That's why Blockbuster's offering you one month of Blockbuster Total Access, No Cost.





Gerald Lipson  
<lojer7747@aol.com>

04/11/2008 08:58 PM

Please respond to  
Gerald Lipson  
<lojer7747@aol.com>

To <alexvamayor@aol.com>, <timothylovain@aol.com>,  
<councilmangaines@aol.com>, <council@krupicka.com>,  
<delpepper@aol.com>, <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>,

cc

bcc

Subject COA Contact Us: Change in Dates of Municipal Elections

12  
4-12-08

Time: [Fri Apr 11, 2008 20:58:53] IP Address: [205.188.117.77]

**Issue Type:** Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members  
**First Name:** Gerald  
**Last Name:** Lipson  
**Street Address:** 1409 Roundhouse Lane  
**City:** Alexandria  
**State:** VA  
**Zip:** 22314  
**Phone:** 703-549-4908  
**Email Address:** lojer7747@aol.com  
**Subject:** Change in Dates of Municipal Elections  
I strobnly oppose changing the dates of city elections to coincide with presidential elections, largely because the issue that confront our city, and on which voters must decide, will largely be lost in the focus on the "top of the ticket." Who is going to pay any attention to candidates for Alexandria City Council and Mayor, when the President is on the ballot. It is true that turnouts for local elections are smaller as they are now scheduled, but they reflect the decisions of voters who have paid attention to the issues and care about them. I am also concerned that this can lead to some serious corruption down the road, because the council members clearly will no longer be accountable to city voters, as their elections will be "buried" under the Presidential vote. I think this is a serious mistake for a city that has enjoyed a very strong and "clean" reputation for good government, and is not worth whatever dollar savings might accrue by eliminating the separate election for city council and mayor.

12  
4-12-08

Statement of Michael E. Hobbs  
for the  
Alexandria City Council  
April 12, 2008

#12 – Report on Changing the Election of the Mayor, City Council and School Board from  
the May General Election Cycle to the November General Election Cycle

Thank you, Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Pepper, and members of Council. I am Michael Hobbs, residing at 419 Cameron Street.

I have participated in the civic life of my community as Co-Chair of the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations; as President of the Old Town Civic Association; as Treasurer of Agenda: Alexandria; as chair of my local political party; as a volunteer in the campaigns of several candidates for public office, and the manager of one; and as a voter in every primary and general election—both in May and November—since I became eligible to vote. My opinions about our election process are, I hope, informed by those experiences, but I speak today for myself, not for any organization.

The active engagement of our citizens in the governmental and electoral processes of our city is a hallmark of our public life. It is central to what makes ours a great city, a real community, and a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The objective of moving our municipal election from May to November presumably would be to increase the number of people who cast votes for our local offices. That would almost certainly be the superficial result. But the unintended consequences of such a move could do grievous harm to the quality, intensity and importance of real and meaningful public participation in our public life. We might strengthen the appearance of public participation in our elections and government, but in fact do critical damage to the reality of that ideal in Alexandria.

Between 15,000 and 20,000 citizens typically vote in our city elections in May. If the election were shifted to November, that number would probably increase significantly, at least in years in which a presidential or gubernatorial election headed the ballot. But would that mean that the quality and importance of citizen participation in Alexandria government has increased proportionately, virtually overnight? Certainly not, and perhaps quite the contrary. It would simply reflect the reality that many more people vote in national and statewide than in local elections, and that having come out to do so, many of those additional voters might vote also for the local offices if they were included on the same ballot.

It is argued that moving the election to November would increase voter turnout—but in fact it is very unlikely that it would increase the number of Alexandria citizens who actually come out to vote in November. Eligible voters who ever turn out for any election (including virtually all of those who ordinarily vote in our local elections) probably vote in Presidential elections already: it is unlikely that any additional voters would be motivated

to turn out in November just by the addition of local offices to the ballot. Indeed, the aggregate number of voters participating in Alexandria elections over the course of a year would almost certainly decline. With the present cycle, we might have, typically, 20,000 voters in May and 60,000 in November. With the new cycle, we might have a very few more than 60,000 in November . . . but we would have 20,000 fewer in May, by definition..

The sheer number of votes cast for local offices on election day is but one measure of the significance and importance of public participation, and by itself probably not the most useful. The value of our public participation in Alexandria is measured more importantly by the engagement of citizens in our political campaigns, both as volunteers and as contributors. It is measured by the openness of our process to new candidates, representing new energy and fresh ideas, in both parties. It is measured by campaigns featuring robust debate and competitive candidates. It is measured by the engagement of parents and citizens representing a broad range of opinions and a shared commitment to our children, in our nonpartisan School Board elections. It is measured by active participation in the public policy debate once the government has been elected, at public hearings such as this, and in other contacts with our elected representatives, both through our civic associations, community groups, and individually. And it is measured, perhaps most importantly, by the focus of public attention on the Alexandria candidates, the Alexandria issues and the Alexandria policy alternatives during our city election campaigns—the sort of concentrated attention which engages most of our citizens in that discussion through local media coverage, candidate forums, campaign events, and family and neighborhood discussions—whether all of them actually turn out to vote on election day or not.

By all of these measures, the quality and importance of public participation in the choice of our local government would be drastically reduced by shifting our municipal elections to November.

In Virginia, election of one or more national or statewide offices heads the ballot every November. With a closely contested presidential, senatorial or gubernatorial election heading the ticket, the ability of city council or school board candidates to attract campaign volunteers would be seriously impaired. Contributions would flow first to the highly sophisticated national and state fundraising campaigns, leaving little for the local candidates. Local candidates, especially new candidates, and most especially school board candidates, would find it virtually impossible to get their message heard amidst the torrent of communications about the national and state campaigns, and prohibitively expensive to do so. Which contest will the media, and the voters, concentrate on: Obama vs. McCain for President? Gilmore vs. Warner for Senate? McDonnell vs. Moran for Governor? Or what the order of finish will be among the Democratic candidates for Council and thus who becomes Vice Mayor?

Probably the single most important determinant in whether or not people vote in an election is how important they think it is to them to do so. They will vote if they believe, first, that the outcome of the election is important to their interest and quality of life, and second, that their vote may be important in determining the outcome. If they feel that both the election and their vote is important, they will vote; if not, they won't.

Why don't more Alexandrians vote in our May elections? Probably because they're seen as less and less competitive over time. We Americans become engaged and involved if it's a truly competitive contest—whether it's Allen vs. Webb, Clinton vs. Obama, the Caps vs. the Flyers, or T.C. vs. Petersburg. Moving our local election from May to November, and thus removing the last vestige of uncertainty from the result, will probably not increase voters' interest in our local races, but reduce it still further.

It is suggested that we should have a referendum on this question because the recommendation of the blue-ribbon panel which studied it last year was unclear or inconclusive. Quite the contrary! The Election Process Review Committee brought a wealth of expertise and experience to the task, including former Alexandria and Virginia legislators of both parties. Two of the nine members recommended that the election be moved to November—but only if the term were changed as well, so that it would never compete with a gubernatorial or Presidential election. Seven recommended that the election not be moved to November at all. Not one member of the distinguished bipartisan panel recommended that the election be moved to November regardless of any other changes—which is the question now proposed for the November ballot.

Your vote on this question on April 22 will have a profound and decisive impact on how our community is governed, and whether those of us who truly care about our local government and policy will continue to have any effective voice in that process. You certainly have the authority and the political power to move the election of the Mayor, Council and School Board from May to November if you want to; it is far less certain whether it would be in Alexandria's best interest for you to assert that power. (Technically, your vote will be on whether to put the question to a referendum this November. But do any of you really have any doubt what the outcome would be? Asking the voters in a Presidential election—a substantial majority of whom may never have participated in a local election—whether they would also like to select our Mayor, Council and School Board in November while they're at it, is a foregone conclusion.)

Conducting our city elections all by themselves, in May, tells our voters that this is the most important election they should follow and participate in as citizens of Alexandria, and in which they can have the most important impact. Shifting the election from May to November shifts it from the most important election to the least, from the top of the ticket to the bottom.

As a citizen who treasures the unique degree to which we now have the opportunity to participate in our local government, I implore you not to jeopardize our rich tradition of citizen government in Alexandria by moving the election to November.

12  
4-12-08

Ladies and Gentlemen of the committee and my fellow Alexandrians,

It is with great pleasure that I submit to you for review my comments in regards to local election frequency and cycles. I am happy the council had the foresight to create this committee, and I am happy to see the distinguished people serving on the committee even though they may be busy with other pressing matters in their personal lives. This is an extremely delicate subject which has been debated since politics were first formed many millennia ago. It deserves to be treated cautiously, and I am happy to see that the members of the council and committee are actively seeking comments from the citizens of this excellent city. Thank you.

In this statement I will dissect the main issue, length of terms, with the aide of one of the most important documents of our founding era, *The Federalist Papers*. I will focus on fellow Virginian, James Madison's, writings. It is important for us to remember that we are in a Lockian Federalism form of government which is a government that is ruled by the people through representation, has a written constitution as fundamental law, and distinct levels of representation starting at the national level, continuing to the state level, and ending at the local level where citizens should be closest to their elected officials.

My focus will be on the two main issues that are driving this committee and are the foundation of the rest of the discussions that follow. I firmly believe that James Madison (and many of the founders) would advise us not to expand the terms of our elected officials and in order to be connected closely with them, not to switch the election date from May to November. The other issues which I will discuss can be made only from inferences, personal belief, and recent history.

### **Length of Terms:**

The fundamental building block of all other issues with which we are discussing are the elected officials' term length. The committee is debating expanding the terms from three years to four. It is startling that the discussion revolves around expanding the terms and not shrinking them. To give the elected officials a three year hiatus between elections is risky to expand it to four is dangerous. Our form of government that our founders created is one that prides itself on elections and its ability to allow the constituency a natural check and balance on the government. Presuming the terms are four years, if the constituency were to make a drastic mistake and elect several incompetent members that ultimately damage our city by raising taxes and obstructing our liberties, then it would be a difficult three years for us to endure before we could vote for new officials. By having shortened terms, our elected officials will take extra precautions to make sure they are in agreement with the populace lest the populace will vote them out of office in the near future.

Short terms are the people's check and balance on the elected officials. It prevents the elected officials from getting lazy in their duties and it keeps them in line with the citizenry. Madison agreed with this assertion. He wrote in *Federalist Paper 56*, "It is a sound and important principle that the representative ought to be acquainted with the interests and circumstances of his constituents." He also explained in *Federalist Paper 52*, "So it is particularly essential that the branch of it [government] under consideration [the

legislative] should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can be effectually secured.” If we allow our representatives 4 years between elections, it is quite likely they will become unacquainted with and independent from the circumstances and sympathies of their constituents.

James Madison dissected this issue further from another equally important point of view. Madison asserted that, “...the greater the power is, the shorter ought to be its duration; and conversely, the smaller the power, the more safely may its duration be protracted.” (*Federalist Paper 53*). If we take a look at our national government we see that our House of Representatives, which is the lower level of legislative branch, has the shortest terms. It is believed that many founders viewed the legislative branch as the most powerful because it is most closely connected to the passions of the people. Our council is our city’s legislative branch, and in our federalism form of government, they are also the closest elected officials to the people and therefore should have shortened terms. I recommend two years.

We also need to be vigilant to our elected officials’ ambitious quests for more power. Using an example of parliament expanding its terms from three years to seven, Madison warned us, in *Federalist Paper 53*, that our legislative bodies may over time attempt to expand their term of office thereby depriving us of our say in government and our liberty. He explained, “An attention to these dangerous practices [expanding terms] has produced a very natural alarm in the votaries of free government, of which frequency of the elections is the cornerstone; and has led them to seek for some security of liberty, against the danger to which it is exposed.” Furthermore, if the terms are increased, will the council simply give themselves an extra year without the consent of citizens? If so, that is the essence of tyranny.

Ultimately, I urge you to shorten the three year terms to two years as Madison and the other writers of the *Federalist Papers* would encourage you to do. It is the best way to assure ourselves that the councilmembers will stay in line with the beliefs of their constituents and it provides our government a natural and rapid check and balance. After all, biennial elections should not intimidate a councilmember who is in close accord with the voters’ sympathies and circumstances.

### **Time of Election:**

It is with much concern and wariness that I consider the idea of switching our city elections from May to November. As aforementioned, it is important for the legislative body to be connected closely with the electorate through frequent elections. It is for this reason that continuing the tradition of May elections best suits the people and our form of government. If we switch to November elections they will be coupled with any number of other offices that will garner more media attention and spend a lot more money. In today’s elections it is not uncommon for a State Senate race to spend 750,000 dollars and a state delegate to spend over 100,000 in close elections. With fall elections being monetarily over inflated, it would be difficult for candidates to raise enough money to increase their name ID, let alone run a solid campaign. Their mailings would be lost in the wash, and their efforts would go in vain. It would become a situation where people with name ID, usually incumbents, would easily win reelection. At this point, the voters would no longer be voting based on policy, only on name ID or randomly. Over time the inability to raise funds and

campaign effectively would drastically decrease the number and quality of candidates and the citizens would be voting blindly, not all, or the races would be uncontested.

Having our city elections in May is the logical method to combat all of the previously stated negative side effects. The presidential, federal, gubernatorial, state senate, or state delegate campaigns would not be able to overwhelm the local candidates, and the local candidates would be able to reach the voters and present their policy. The local candidates would be able to more closely understand their electorate, and the May elections would keep them in check. Additionally, in today's political arena, we are quite far removed from our federal and state representatives, but in our form of federalism the smaller the unit of government, the closer we should be to the officials. The most sacred level of federalism is the level that is closest to the people, in this case, the local level. If we move the election to November, we prevent our voters from having that closeness with their locally elected officials because they will be overwhelmed with broader issues. It would be the nascent of the degradation of our political system. Therefore, I urge the committee to continue local elections in May.

### **Staggering Terms:**

If the terms are staggered, it should be two people every year, however I do not think the terms should be staggered, as it would require annual elections for only one third of the council which would increase the number of elections we have even more so than in my recommended two year plan. Plus, if you adopt the two year plan, there would be no need to stagger terms. If the terms are staggered however our elections will transcend into a money election and whichever pair could raise the most money would be most likely to win the race as there would likely be only four or five people vying for the two positions. The ability for outsiders and candidates without independent wealth to win would greatly diminish as the choices for office would be fewer.

Most importantly however, is to keep all of the council members on the same election cycle so if the entire group happens to do something so incredibly flagrant or egregious they can all be removed at the same time. Look at our state delegates and our House of Representatives, in theory the entire body could change in one election if their constituents are unhappy. It is a natural check and balance on the system.

### **Elections by District:**

I would be inclined to disagree with the district idea for the city council for a few reasons. So as not to contradict myself, let me explain. I think it is absolutely essential that our elected officials in Alexandria be closely tied to the people and their interests, and if each council member represented a smaller district it would force them to be even closer to their constituents. This is true, however it would be completely unnecessary for Alexandria to be broken into districts as we are a small enough city that we all need to look out for our common good. The interests of the people around the city won't change much from intersection to intersection. In other levels of our government districts are necessary because they represent more people in larger areas, and the common good may change from locality to locality.

Even if we adopted districts, who would create them? How would they be created? Would they ever change? Most of the time districts are created, they are not objective and they are usually gerrymandered to impact one party or person favorably.

The districts would only complicate matters and turn the entire council into a feuding political nightmare. Districts would present pork barrel fist fights when the budget is discussed as each council member would then attempt to secure pet projects for his/her district in an effort to be reelected, not in an effort to better our city. If the council members deliver projects, then they are more likely to win reelection, and not necessarily because of their policy. It would also be a way for the majority faction of council members to manipulate the minority faction and prevent him/her from delivering to his/her district. All of these would result in undermining the intent and purpose of our government.

### **Non-Partisan Council Elections:**

It is to the council members' and voters' benefits that city elections be non-partisan. With the city council race being a partisan affair, it allows the voters an easy out in determining for whom they should vote. They are less likely to make decisions based on policy, and more likely to make their decision based on label. In local elections, voters should be more connected with their candidates and should be given the opportunity to vote objectively based on policy and not be clouded with an automatic bias. At the state and national levels partisan labels are acceptable, because the candidates could not effectively contact most of their constituents, so a party label is important. That is not the case in local elections. If the elections are non-partisan, we would get a better array of candidates in each election. Forcing candidates to have a party affiliation for local elections is unnecessary and would ruin the voters' objective thought.

### **Compensation:**

For this issue I do not feel I could accurately assess the situation. The pay seems like what it should be, but if it is necessary for a pay raise, that's City Council's decision. Remember when making that decision, the money paying those salaries comes out of the voters' purses and wallets. Before the council raises their pay, they may want to make sure they are in agreement with the concerns of their constituents.

### **Conclusion:**

1. We should adopt 2 year terms not 3 or 4 year terms
2. Our elections should stay in May
3. Terms should not be staggered
4. All seats should be city wide without districts
5. City offices should be non partisan
6. Compensation is at the discretion of the council, but they need to remember who pays them, and what the repercussions could be.



I thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to present my arguments. This is an extremely valuable forum for the people of Alexandria. Thank you for your time and commitment to these issues.

Submitted by:

Stephen E. Dreikorn  
2701 Park Center Dr., B1603  
June 1, 2007

Members of the Council and Mayor Euille:

I am pleased to be here today and I thank you for allowing public comments on such a serious issue. I am happy the council had the foresight to create the committee which investigated every aspect of municipal election changes last year. However, I am equally unhappy that certain Council Members feel they should disregard the hard work and dedicated time of those committee members who had laid the matter to rest. Perhaps the certain Council Members wanted to beat the proverbial dead horse or maybe revive it for selfish interests. Changing the election to November can only be described as an: Incumbency Protection Plan.

In *Federalist Paper 56* fellow Virginian James Madison wrote, "It is a sound and important principle that the representative ought to be acquainted with the interests and circumstances of his constituents." He also explained in *Federalist Paper 52*, "So it is particularly essential that the branch of it [government] under consideration [the legislative] should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with the people." By moving the elections to November, the council would be essentially drowning out any genuine policy debate that would benefit the voters and help them with their decisions; thereby distancing themselves

from their constituents' interests. With fall elections being monetarily over inflated, it would be difficult for candidates to raise enough money to increase their name ID, let alone run a solid campaign. It would become a situation where people with name ID, usually incumbents, would easily win reelection. The voters would no longer be voting based on policy. Over time the inability to raise funds and campaign effectively would drastically decrease the number and quality of candidates and the citizens would be voting blindly, not all, or the races would be uncontested. Uncontested races...Now that would be perfect for the Incumbency Protection Plan.

The May elections allow the local candidates to better understand their electorate, and the May elections would in turn keep a better check on the elected officials. If the Council Members are respecting their constituents' wishes, then you should not fear an isolated municipal election in May where those who vote genuinely care about local policy. By keeping the elections in May, it forces the voters to think locally and prohibits any group from riding a national tidal wave to victory or being carried by an extremely successful statewide candidate. If you move the election to November, you prevent your constituents from having closeness

with you, because the voters will be overwhelmed with broader issues. It would be the nascent of the degradation of our local political system. Therefore, I urge you to step away from the Incumbency Protection Plan and continue the tradition of local elections in May.

In closing, for the sake of your constituents and understanding their concerns listen to our Founders' wisdom. Keeping our representative form of government held together with checks and balances and solid policy discussions requires you to be close to your constituents. The only logical check and balance for this is a May election. Do not vote for the November Incumbency Protection Plan. If you are serving your constituents, perhaps by following the recommendations of the bipartisan committee you sanctioned, you will win re-election even if we vote in May. If you vote for the November Incumbency Protection Plan, you will be partaking in a sickening degree of political cowardice.

Thank you very much for your time. I hope you have a great day.

12  
4-12-08

12

**From John Howard Eisenhower, 630 S. Pitt St.**

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING THE ELECTION REFORM  
PROPOSAL AT CITY COUNCIL ON APRIL 12, 2008**

MR MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL --

MY NAME IS JOHN EISENHOUR. MY WIFE AND I HAVE LIVED IN  
THE CITY SINCE 1966 AND WE HAVE BEEN HEAVILY INVOLVED  
IN THE ELECTION PROCESS FOR MUCH OF THAT TIME. I HOPE THAT YOU  
WILL READ MY ENTIRE STATEMENT BUT GIVEN THE TIME CONSTRAINT I  
PLAN TO PRESENT AN ABBREVIATED VERSION NOW.

I WOULD LIKE TO START WITH A RHETORICAL QUESTION – HAVE  
YOU EVER TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE OVERALL ELECTIONS CYCLE IN  
THIS CITY TO A NEW VOTER?

AS SOMEONE WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE CITY COUNCIL'S CITIZENS AD  
HOC COMMITTEE BACK IN 1972–1973 (RESULTED IN SPEAKER TIME LIMITS,  
LIGHTS AND BUZZERS, SATURDAY PUBLIC HEARING MEETINGS,  
PUBLISHED ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULES, COUNCIL  
AIDES, ETC), MANY YEARS EXPERIENCE AS AN ELECTION DAY OFFICIAL,  
AND AS THE CURRENT OFFICE MANAGER FOR THE ALEXANDRIA  
DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE, I HAVE AN INTENSE INTEREST IN THIS  
SUBJECT AND, PERHAPS, A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON THE ELECTION  
CYCLE. I TESTIFIED AT LENGTH BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON THIS  
AND RELATED SUBJECTS THAT DICK HOBSON CHAIRED LAST JUNE AND I  
WAS VERY DISAPPOINTED WITH THE RESULTS OF THAT BODY'S

THE BALLOT MEASURE WILL FAIL UNLESS YOU ARE IN A POSITION TO  
EXPLAIN A MORE COMPLETE PLAN. A PLAN THAT:

- DEALS WITH THE INEVITABILITY OF LOCAL ELECTIONS OCCURRING IN BUSY YEARS E.G., 2012 WHEN ON THE CURRENT SCHEDULE VOTERS COULD FACE A LOCAL PARTY CAUCUS IN JANUARY, A PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY IN FEBRUARY, A LOCAL ELECTION IN MAY, A US SENATE/HOUSE PRIMARY IN JUNE, AND A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NOVEMBER) , AND
- ASSURES ALEXANDRIANS THAT LOCAL ELECTIONS WILL OCCUR IN THE QUIETEST NOVEMBER IN EACH FOUR YEAR CYCLE.

MY LIST OF REASONS FOR SUPPORTING THE RESOLUTION AS DRAFTED  
AND THE PUBLIC COMMITMENTS THAT I THINK SHOULD BE ASSOCIATED  
WITH IT FOLLOW:

**REASONS FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER:**

- MORE VOTERS WILL PARTICIPATE – AND I CONSIDER THE NOTION THAT A LOW TURNOUT IS A GOOD THING SINCE ONLY LONG TIME RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE TO BE ANTI (SMALL D) DEMOCRATIC
- FEWER EXPENDITURES BY CITY (MAYBE \$ 200,000 OF THE \$1,200,000 NOW BEING SPENT ANNUALLY BY THE ELECTIONS BOARD) AS WELL AS BY MANY CITIZENS WHO GET HIT UP CONSTANTLY FOR MONEY BY CANDIDATES AT EVERY LEVEL
- REGULARIZE THE ANNUAL PROCESS – PRIMARIES AND/OR CAUCUSES IN JUNE, ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER
- MANY VIRGINIA CITIES HAVE ALREADY DONE THIS
- THE OFT HEARD ARGUMENTS THAT IT IS GOOD FOR COUNCIL TO BE PRESSURED BY AN ELECTION THREAT NEAR BUDGET TIME EVERY THIRD YEAR (BUT NOT OTHER YEARS) AND THAT CIVIC GROUPS CAN'T GET “GEARED UP” IN THE FALL STRIKE ME AS FRIVOLOUS
- BEST OF ALL, ONE LESS ELECTION AND, IF THE PARTIES WOULD AGREE TO USE THE JUNE PRIMARY THAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN

WHEN THE CHARTER CHANGES ARE APPROVED, THE OVERALL ELECTIONS  
SCHEDULE FACING ALEXANDRIA VOTERS SHOULD LOOK LIKE THIS  
BEGINNING IN 2011:

LEAP YEAR +3 2011,15,19	PRIMARY FOR VA SENATOR/DELEGATES, ALEX MAYOR/COUNCIL/SCHOOL BOARD	JUNE
	GENERAL ELECTION	NOVEMBER
LEAP YEAR 2012,16,20	PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY	FEBRUARY
	PRIMARY FOR U.S. HOUSE AND U.S. SENATE (SOMETIMES)	JUNE
	GENERAL ELECTION	NOVEMBER
LEAP YEAR + 1 2013,17, 21	PRIMARY FOR VA OFFICERS/DELEGATES	JUNE
	GENERAL ELECTION	NOVEMBER
LEAP YEAR + 2 2014,18,22	PRIMARY FOR U.S. HOUSE AND U.S.SENATE (SOMETIMES)	JUNE
	GENERAL ELECTION	NOVEMBER

AND THE ABOVE SCHEDULE WILL REPEAT ITSELF – A FEATURE THAT I AM  
SURE MOST OF THE PUBLIC AND, FOR SURE THE NEW VOTER LEARNING  
ABOUT OUR SYSTEM FOR THE FIRST TIME, WILL APPRECIATE.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

12  
4-12-08

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RICHARD R. G. HOBSON  
TO THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL  
ON SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2008  
ON DOCKET ITEM NO. 12

To be heard at the public hearing on the report on changing the election of the Mayor, Members of City Council and Members of the School Board from the May General Election cycle to the November General Election cycle and the resolution proposing an advisory referendum on this issue during the November 4, 2008, general election.

**Mayor Euille and Members of the Council:**

I had intended to deliver this statement to you in person but the recent death of a long time friend and classmate and the resulting schedule of funeral services necessitated that I present this statement in writing to the Clerk and request that it be included in the record of this Public Hearing.

In making this statement I am speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the Election Process Committee of which I was the chair and which Committee rendered its report to the Council on June 21, 2007.

This Election Process Committee was appointed by the Mayor and was asked to examine and make recommendations on election issues, including the possible movement of Council and School Board elections from May to November. The Committee included two persons who have served in the General Assembly representing the City of Alexandria, three former members of the City Council and one former School Board member, one former legislative aide, a current member of the Electoral Board and several members who have been active in the City political party committees and political campaigns.



The Committee met a number of times and formulated and published a list of issues and invited public comment thereon, either in person at a public hearing or in writing or by email. In May it circulated a document describing the number of alternative election options, sought public reaction for each issue, gave some background information, described current City practice, summarized any changes to that practice they were under consideration and listed arguments for and against the changes. The Committee held a public hearing on June 2, Saturday at 10:00 a.m. in Council Chambers and received responses in person or in writing from twenty seven (27) residents.

Although there was some difference of opinion on a number of the issues, there was a substantial consensus and that consensus did not break down along political party lines. In other words, the line up, pro and con of the issues did not follow political partisan lines. In the issue of moving elections for the City Council and School Board to November, the majority, consisting of seven of the nine members, favored continuing to hold those elections in May. Two members preferred to move it to November and have elections for a four (4) year term for Council. The reasons for the positions taken varied from member to member, but there was substantial consensus that although the move to November would result in the participation of more voters, the Committee heard from residents of their concerns that the consideration of local issues would suffer when joined in a November election with Federal or State candidates and issues, and that the increased turn out of voters in a particular November election would not mean increased informed interest about local issues.

The Committee membership included persons that have held office as representatives of both political parties as well as those that have been independent.

Although, with some difference of opinion on a number of issues, there was substantial consensus particularly on the issue before you today, moving the Council and School Board elections to November. It is noteworthy that this consensus did not break down along political party lines.

In short, I believe and agree with in the seven (7) of the nine (9) members who found that the examination of and citizen voting participation in/and the informed outcome of any Council or School Board issues would suffer if the Council and School Board elections were combined with Federal or State elections. For these reasons, I oppose the proposed referendum at the General Election in November 2008.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Richard R. G. Hobson

12  
4-12-08

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF ALEXANDRIA  
April 12, 2008

Public Hearing - City Council

Subject: Changing local elections from May to June

My name is Judy Miller representing the League of Women Voters as its president. I've heard that some question our integrity by not giving full counsel to both: assent and dissent (to acquiescence of allowing this to be a referendum on November's ballot). For the record let it be known that today I intend to enumerate benefits that could possibly accompany the choice of allowing local elections to take place in November.

#1 is self-evident. Every third year there would not have to be funding for a local May election. This would save \$\$\$\$.

#2. Since people are bombarded every fall with election campaign materials, it would ensure a higher turnout of voters who recognize that voting takes place every November.  
This would also seem to be self-evident.

#3. Long-term incumbency could be eliminated:

#3 (a) If there is dissatisfaction with current policy such as raising taxes, too much traffic, too much development, too little development, whatever; the 'once-a-year' voter now gets an opportunity to 'throw the bums out'. "Not much thought needed here - just get rid of them."

#3 (b) Funding for individual candidates may be a cost-saving for some -- they can ride the coat tails of the better-funded, more well-known (state or federal) candidates who always receive greater press/media coverage. Provided they are in good standing with this person, and adhere to the party line, and other provisions, the party will see that they get included in brochures, ads, etc. Therefore, this could be a cost-saving benefit to some candidates. Now, does this also ensure that the popular political party in power stays in power, encouraging people to vote the 'party ticket'?

#3 (c) Branding is a term that marketers use in introducing a product. An untested candidate who really wants to win can spend big \$\$\$\$ in promoting himself, buying lots of T.V. time, putting up many signs throughout the city, and thus create a 'brand' for himself that is recognizable to many people when they come to vote. His name could be similar to well-known folks, or kith 'n kin to popular sports figures, or even the son of a well-loved Redskins coach, or astronaut, etc. And people do love to be comfortable with a brand that is now familiar to them; this candidate could be a shoo-in during a November election.

However, in order to present a balanced presentation, I am obliged to lodge some dissent: The League publishes a Candidate's Questionnaire for elections. Am not sure whether or not publishers would be willing to publicize as many as 14 council/mayor candidates, and 12 school board candidates in addition to their coverage of larger offices who appeal to a greater mass. It is questionable as to whether or not these candidates could capture the attention of John Q. Public hurrying to vote and be no longer delayed.

For brevity of time, I say no more, but ask that you consider others who also have grave concerns regarding this change. Our representative on the task force could not agree with this effort.

12  
4-12-08

12 April 2008

Mayor Euille and members of city council,

The stated concern is to engage the entire community as we plan for the future and you have chosen the measure of community engagement to be citizen participation in the electoral process. I'm not certain that so much should be placed on that particular metric given the number of civic associations, committees, task forces, and working groups in the city, and the level of citizen participation for which a special annual event is held to acknowledge and honor.

But here we are in spite of the fact that one of those committees, comprised of civic leaders, past city council members and state representatives, after collecting information and hearing public testimony, recommended that no change be made to the city's election process.

To be fair, one of my criticisms of the efforts of that committee was that they did not ascertain why the citizens of Alexandria choose not to participate in the electoral process. And I must admit that placing a question on the November ballot is a cost effective means to collect information although it is of limited value since it only reflects the opinion of those people that bother to vote. Essentially you are asking those that vote in November if they would like the convenience of not having to vote in May. While convenience is a factor, I would remind you that on a cold miserable day in February, with an ice storm, the past primary drew twice as many people as the past council election. Perhaps a more important factor is the perception the election is important, that it makes a difference. Perhaps the city, the political parties, and all the citizen volunteers we honor once a year need to do more to convince the non-participators to get out and vote!

Returning to the matters at hand: the proposed ballot question and the recommended schedule of Public and Legislative hearings to follow.

First, I find the recommended schedule of Public and Legislative hearings to be more than ambitious. The recommendation "At the November 15, 2008 Public Hearing, the City Council shall solicit input as to additional changes to our elections that may be required." and then ten days later "At the November 25, 2008 Legislative Meeting, the City Council shall adopt a resolution including any desired changes to the City Charter." is almost aggressive and suggests a desired outcome already exists. Where is the public process to develop a considered, written, coherent proposal for our future city election process? Such a document did not result from the previous committee's efforts since they recommended no change.

Second and most important for today's discussion, I do not believe that the proposed ballot question collects the information we need to make the informed decisions required to develop such a document. Additionally, the motion before you does nothing to engender the citizen participation that is supposedly the whole point of this exercise.

Personally, I think the city's election process need no changes, but if we must go down this path then I recommend the following approach:

1. Reconvene the committee and task them to revisit the issues and draft an appropriate set of ballot questions in time for the November ballot. The issues are broader than what is covered by the proposed ballot question and the opportunity to collect information using ballot questions was not available to the previous committee.
2. In the off chance the committee cannot develop a recommended set of ballot questions, then you should approve the current ballot question so something is in place for the November ballot.
3. Create a city web page dedicated to the issue. The minimum content should include today's docket item with the oral and written testimony, the 1992-93 and 2007 committee reports, and the various minutes and working documents of the most recent committee.

The web page should also provide a mechanism/forum for public discussion on the issue. Otherwise, public discussion is at the mercy of the press, the articles and letters they choose to print, the editorials they choose to write. Perhaps, the committee could moderate it.

4. Drop the recommended schedule for subsequent Public and Legislative Hearings in favor of a more deliberative, public process. If we are going to change our election process we should do it right.
5. Democracy has always been touted as a hallmark of Alexandria, so in the spirit of Robert's Rules, we should view these ballot questions as virtual changes to the city's by-laws. The question should not move forward if less than two-thirds of the registered voters do not participate in the election.

The purpose of this docket item is to take action that will eventually increase citizen participation in the electoral process. I think it is incumbent on you to lead by doing the maximum to encourage citizen participation in changing the electoral process.

Sincerely,  
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