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Subject Election Referendum Concepts for Discussion

May 9, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

(Jackie, can you please include this with the docket materials on this item?)

In an attempt to forge a compromise, I have taken your comments as well as those of the City Attorney to draft advisory referendum questions that respond to many of the major concerns brought up at the public hearing. Please feel free to share any other thoughts or suggestions.

1) Complete Options: The original proposed ballot question was criticized because there were many ways that it could be implemented depending on charter changes, etc. The four concepts below all lead to clear and specific approaches to local elections.

2) Federal Influence: Many of the concerns raised involved wanting to focus on local issues and not wanting to overshadow them with Federal issues. None of the options below come into direct conflict with federal or presidential elections. In this list, the current election approach, which overlaps with federal election years from time to time, comes the closest to being overshadowed by federal campaigns. The November election options would overlap with some state elections. Given the influence of state actions on local government, an argument can be made that holding delegate and council elections at the same time would provide the community with a much more comprehensive understanding of local issues, especially the extensive role the state plays in local matters (e.g. Mirant, transportation, education, mental health issues, smoking bans, land-use powers, etc.)

3) Two Major Subjects: These are designed to allow for public input on the two most discussed subjects at the hearing and by the study group: May or November and staggered or all at once. The design of these questions allows us to gage the public's view about each option.

4) Advisory: These questions are advisory and are designed to ensure voters can select more than one choice. We are not allowed by law to do a multiple choice question. The proposed approach enables us to determine if there is a strong sentiment in any direction or whether the community is open to multiple options and therefore less passionate about changes. Whatever the outcome of this referendum, I would suggest that we plan to hold a public hearing on any potential charter changes after the November

elections and before sending them to the General Assembly. That will give the community one additional time to comment and weigh-in on this prior to any final decision. I suggest we direct the City Attorney to prepare draft charter changes to go with each question so that they are available to anybody that wishes to review them prior to voting on the referendum question. The drafts should be made available in city libraries and at city hall.

5) Public Education: While there may be public education benefits that come from a fall election due to heightened public and media attention, these questions do not specifically address the question of whether enhanced voter education is something for the Council to address. I suggest that we ask our City Attorney and Legislative Director to propose an item for our legislative package that would allow the City to create voter guides. In addition, I'd suggest that if the public and the Council choose to move elections to the fall, that a portion of the financial savings be directed towards voter education.

6) Putting It to Bed: It is clear that there are many views in the community and on Council about these issues. I respect the various views we have heard. These issues have been discussed and debated for the last 20 years and more. The current at-large election process for the Mayor and the 6 members of Council was approved by the General Assembly in 1948, following a referendum, as a change to the City Charter. It replaced a 9-member City Council, with 6 members elected by ward and 3 at large, that had been in place since 1932. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the City had a bicameral legislative body elected by wards. In 1922, the bicameral body was abolished and replaced by a 5-member city council and a city manager.

Changing the way we organize our elections is not unique, though clearly we don't do it frequently. Much like the school board referendum in the 90's, the proposed questions follow this history by once again allowing the entire voting public to weigh in prior to the Council requesting any charter changes. Whatever the outcome, the public will have spoken and there will not be a need to re-visit this for a long time. This provides a clear mechanism to put these issues to bed for perhaps another 60 years, if not more.

I look forward to working with all of you on this.

Respectfully,

Rob Krupicka

Proposed Questions (comments welcomed):

The City Council is seeking public input regarding changes to the city charter to determine if the community prefers a different process to elect the City Council and School Board. The following questions represents four approaches to conduct local elections. All options are designed to avoid

overlap with federal elections. Please vote "yes" or "no" on each question.

1) Do you support a change to four-year terms of service for the City Council and School Board with November elections every four years for all members held at the same time as state delegate and state senate elections?

2) Do you support a change to four-year, staggered terms of service for the City Council and School Board with November elections every two years for a portion of the Council and School Board held at the same time as other state elections?

3) Do you support a change to four-year, staggered terms of service for the City Council and School Board with May elections every two years for a portion of the Council and School Board?

4) Do you support continuing the existing three-year term of service for the City Council and School Board with May elections for all members?