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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 21, 2007

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 8

SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE CREATED TO REVIEW THE ELECTION PROCESS FOR ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL AND THE SCHOOL BOARD

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**ISSUE:** Report of the Committee Created to Review the Election Process for Alexandria City Council and the School Board.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council: (1) receive this report and thank the Committee for its work; and (2) schedule it for comment at Council's public hearing meeting on September 15, 2007.

**DISCUSSION:** In March, Mayor Euille created a Committee to review a number of issues with respect to the election process for City Council and the School Board (including the transfer of Election Day for City elections from May to November, and the creation of staggered terms for Council and the School Board), as well as compensation for City Council and the School Board members. The Committee met seven times between mid-March and mid-June; one of these meetings was a public hearing at which residents could comment on the policy alternatives under consideration by the Committee. After carefully considering the issues it was asked to review, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

- that the current process for Council and School Board elections not be changed;
- that Council itself determine if a pay raise for a future Council is warranted (the process authorized under current law);
- that the School Board itself determine if a pay raise for a future School Board is warranted (the process authorized under current law); and
- that staff assistance for the Mayor and Council be increased (for Council members, from the current 0.5 FTE per Member to 1.0 FTE per member; and for the Mayor, from the current 1.0 FTE to 1.5 FTE).

Staff will provide a financial impact analysis of the recommendations prior to the September public hearing.

**ATTACHMENT:** Report of the Committee Created to Review the Election Process for Alexandria City Council and the School Board (June 21, 2007)

**STAFF:** Bernard Caton, Legislative Director

**REPORT OF  
THE COMMITTEE CREATED TO REVIEW  
THE ELECTION PROCESS FOR  
ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL AND THE  
SCHOOL BOARD**

**TO ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL**

**June 21, 2007**

**Committee Members:**

**Richard Hobson, Chair  
Becky Davies, Vice Chair  
Robert L. Calhoun  
Christopher M. Campagna  
Lynnwood Campbell  
William C. "Bill" Cleveland  
Iris Henley  
Anna Leider  
Joyce Woodson**

**Staff: Bernard Caton, Legislative Director**

To the Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council:

In March, the members of this Committee were asked to review a number of issues with respect to the election process for City Council and the School Board, as well as compensation for City Council and the School Board. We have carefully considered the issues you asked us to review, and we make the following recommendations.

1. We recommend that the current process for Council and School Board elections not be changed.
2. We believe that 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.
3. We believe 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 full-time aide (each member currently has a half-time aide). We 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).

A further explanation of our recommendations follows.

### **BACKGROUND**

In March 2007, Mayor William D. Euille appointed a committee of City residents to review the election process for Mayor, City Council, and the School Board, and related issues. The committee consisted of Richard Hobson (who was elected as Chair), Becky Davies (who was elected as Vice Chair), Robert L. Calhoun, Christopher M. Campagna, Lynnwood Campbell, William C. "Bill" Cleveland, Iris Henley, Anna Leider, and Joyce Woodson. The Committee was asked to examine and make recommendations on possible options to move City elections from May to November; create staggered terms for Council and the School Board; and revise Council and School Board compensation based upon comparability with other jurisdictions in the region, as well as issues related to these items.

Since 1973, the Alexandria City Charter has provided for Mayoral and City Council elections to be held every three years on the second Tuesday in May. School Board elections have been held on the same schedule since 1994. The Constitution and Code of Virginia allow cities such as Alexandria to hold elections for Mayor, City Council and the School Board in May or November. Terms of office can run from one to four years in length. The Code specifies that elections and terms for School Board members must be the same as those for City Council.

The Committee met several times in March, April, and May. In May, it widely circulated a document (Appendix 1) describing a number of alternative policy options to seek public reaction. For each issue, the document gave some background, described current City practice, summarized any changes to that practice that were under consideration, and listed arguments for and against the changes. The Committee invited members of the public to respond to the issues set out in the document at the Committee's public hearing on June 2 at 10 a.m. in the Council Chambers in City Hall, or by e-mail or in writing. The Committee received responses (in person, or by e-mail or mail) from 27 residents.

Commenters were asked to address each issue on which they wish to comment separately, since the Committee anticipated that some commenters may support some changes but not others (e.g., they may support staggered terms, but oppose moving elections to November).

Following the public hearing, the Committee reviewed the information it received and now makes the following recommendations.

### **ISSUES**

The issues under study by the committee were the following:

1. Should Council and School Board elections be moved to November? If so, should the 3-year term be extended to 4 years?
2. Should Council and School Board terms be staggered?
3. Should any or all Council members be elected by district? If so, how should the City be divided into districts? If the City were to elect its Council members by district, how would you want those districts to be drawn up (e.g., would you prefer 3 districts with 2 Council members from each district; 6 districts with one Council member from each district; some Council members running in districts and some at large)?
4. Should any change be made in the number of School Board members (now 9)?
5. Should Council elections be non-partisan?
6. Should Council and School Board compensation be increased?

### **ALTERNATIVES**

The Committee discussed a number of alternatives to current policies and processes, and prepared a document on the issues under its consideration (Appendix 1). For each issue, the document gave some background and described current City practice and changes to the practice that are under consideration, as well as arguments for and against the changes.

The Committee invited members of the public to respond to the issues set out in the document at a June 2 public hearing, or in writing. Twenty-seven individuals did so; a summary of their comments on the issues listed above is attached as Appendix 2.

Based on these comments and its members' subsequent deliberations, the Committee makes the following recommendations.

*Moving elections to November.* The Committee<sup>1</sup> recommends that the City continue to hold Council and School Board elections in May. Seven Committee members (Hobson, Davies, Calhoun, Campagna, Campbell, Cleveland, Henley, and Woodson) voted to retain May elections. Two (Calhoun and Leider) prefer having the Mayor and Council elected for a 4-year term in November, in the year before each presidential election year (this is the odd-numbered year in which all General Assembly members are elected; it is also the year when many Virginia counties hold their elections for Boards of Supervisors).

Several years ago, the General Assembly authorized cities and towns, which have traditionally held elections in May, to move them to November, when most national, state and county elections are held in Virginia. Since then, some City residents have suggested that turnout for City Council and School Board will be increased if these elections are held in November, when voter turnout is higher (turnout for the last 3 Council and School Board elections has ranged from 20 to 27 percent, while that for November elections is usually 40 to 50 percent, except for presidential elections, when it increases to 75 to 80 percent).

The Committee considered the value of increased turnout, but heard from some residents the concerns that (1) the consideration of local issues would suffer when joined at the November election with federal and state candidates and issues, and (2) the increased turnout would be made up primarily of voters who were uninformed about local issues. Based on this and other concerns that were expressed (such as the difficulty local candidates would have in attracting campaign contributions and volunteers in the fall), the majority of the Committee agreed that elections should not be moved to November.

*Extending the 3-year term to 4 years.* The major rationale for extending the term of office was to avoid having Council members or the School Board appear on the same ballot as presidential candidates (this would happen every 12 years) or candidates for statewide office; the Committee felt that it would be very difficult to get voters to focus on local candidates at the same time they were focusing on a presidential election or statewide elections. Since the majority of the Committee did not support November elections, there was no need for the Committee to address this issue.

As noted above, two members (Calhoun and Leider) prefer having the Mayor and Council elected for a 4-year term in November, in the year before each presidential election year (the odd-numbered year in which all General Assembly members are elected).

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, if a statement is made that "the Committee" supported a given issue, this means that a majority of the Committee was in support; it does not necessarily mean that the vote was unanimous.

*Staggered terms.* The Committee recommends that all Council and School Board members continue to be elected at the same time, and that terms not be staggered. Six Committee members (Hobson, Davies, Campbell, Cleveland, Leider and Woodson) voted in the majority to retain the current electoral process and not stagger terms. Three (Calhoun, Campagna, and Henley) prefer having staggered terms.

Currently, the Mayor and all members of Council and the School Board run for office at the same time for three-year terms. Some localities in Virginia “stagger” the election of their Councils or Boards so that not all members are chosen at once. Proponents of staggered terms believe that it increases voter interest, since voters are able to focus their attention on a small number of candidates (as opposed the 10-15 candidates that run in each Alexandria City Council election). Staggered terms also increase the experience and institutional memory of an elected body, since they lessen the likelihood that a huge turnover in office holders will occur at any one time.

At the same time, however, staggered terms prevent voters from turning out an entire Council or School Board if they are dissatisfied with the body’s policies. Staggered terms also increase the frequency of Council and School Board elections. The Elections Committee noted that there has been no major turnover in the Council’s membership in any election, at least in recent times. For these reasons, the majority of the Committee did not find the arguments in favor of staggered terms persuasive, and recommends against staggered terms. Two members of the Committee (Calhoun and Campagna) disagreed with the majority and would support staggered terms.

*Elections by district or ward.* The Committee recommends that all Council members continue to be elected from the City at-large rather than from wards or districts. Seven Committee members (Hobson, Campagna, Campbell, Cleveland, Henley, Leider and Woodson) voted in the majority to retain at-large elections. Two (Davies and Calhoun) prefer having some Council members elected at-large, and some from districts or wards.

In the past, Alexandria has elected at least some of its members from districts, but since 1948, the Mayor and all Council members have been elected from the City at-large. The pattern in other Virginia cities varies, with some electing their local representatives by wards or districts, others electing them at-large, and still others using a combination of the two methods.

While the Committee considered the argument that voters could communicate their needs better to individual Council members if they were elected by district, it believes that the current at-large system has served the City well and encourages all Council members to look out for the needs of the entire City.

*Drawing up Council districts.* Since the Committee recommended against Council wards or districts, there was no need to consider how such districts would be drawn. However, the Committee expressed the view that if such Council districts are drawn, the School Board districts should conform to these districts.

*Size of the School Board.* The Committee also considered whether the size of the School Board should be changed. There appears to be very little interest in this issue—only two members of the public commented on it. The Committee saw no reason to recommend changes to the size of the School Board, and recommended unanimously (Hobson, Davies, Calhoun, Campagna, Campbell, Cleveland, Henley, Leider and Woodson) to leave the School Board at its current size (9 members).

*Non-partisan Council elections.* The Committee recommends that the City continue to permit partisan elections for City Council. Seven Committee members (Hobson, Davies, Calhoun, Campagna, Cleveland, Henley, and Leider) voted in the majority to retain partisan elections (though it should be noted that candidates can run as independents even now). Two (Campbell and Woodson) prefer having all candidates for Council run without a party label.

In Virginia, localities generally can choose whether or not to hold City Council and County Board races on a partisan basis (i.e., allow candidates to run under a party label). The practices of Alexandria's neighboring localities vary. Some have non-partisan elections, such as the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church. Our larger Virginia neighbors (the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William) all have partisan elections.

While Virginia law requires school board elections to be non-partisan, it allows political parties to endorse school board candidates (Arlington County follows this practice).

The main argument the Committee heard in favor of non-partisan elections is that the numerous federal employees who live in Alexandria would find it easier to run for Council. Federal employees, who cannot run for office with a party label, can be endorsed by a political party. They are precluded, however, from making use of such an endorsement (e.g., using it in campaign ads or other campaign material).

The Committee believes that political parties play a worthwhile role in the electoral process and recommends that the current process for partisan elections continue unchanged.

*Compensation of the Mayor, Council Members, and School Board Members.* The Committee recommends unanimously (Hobson, Davies, Calhoun, Campagna, Campbell, Cleveland, Henley, Leider and Woodson) that the current half-time aides to each Council member be made full-time, and that the Mayor's staffing be increased a similar amount (from the current equivalent of a full-time person to one and a half full-time persons). The Committee also recommends unanimously against raising School Board salaries. Finally, the Committee made no recommendation on whether the salaries of the Mayor, the Council and the School Board should be increased; it believes that Council and the School Board respectively should make that decision (i.e., the Council should decide for the Mayor and Council, and the School Board should decide for the School Board). Both bodies already have the statutory authority to make such a decision.



Alexandria's Mayor and Council Members have received their current salaries (shown below with salaries for other elected officials in Northern Virginia) since July 1, 2003. Under Virginia law, these salaries cannot be increased before July 1, 2009. Alexandria School Board salaries were set at their current level as of July 1, 2006 (also shown below), and cannot be increased before July 1, 2009.

The Committee noted that although Alexandria Council members are paid less than their counterparts in the other major Northern Virginia jurisdictions, they are paid as much as if not more than Council members in any other Virginia city. There was strong sentiment among Committee members that salaries should not be so high that they are seen as a way to earn a living.

While Committee members did not object to an increase (especially a modest one) in the salary of the Mayor and Council members, they agreed that Council already has the authority to set compensation and that issue should be decided by that body. They saw no need for an outside body, such as the Elections Committee, to make any recommendation to Council. Likewise, the Committee recommended that the School Board should decide on School Board salaries without a recommendation from the Committee.

***Salaries of Mayors, Chairs, and Members of City Councils and Boards of Supervisors***

<b><i>Locality</i></b>	<b><i>Mayor/Board Chair</i></b>	<b><i>Council/Board Members</i></b>
<i>Alexandria (population: 132,343)</i>	<i>\$30,500</i>	<i>\$27,500</i>
<i>Arlington, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 194,358)</i>	<i>\$53,900</i>	<i>\$49,000</i>
<i>Fairfax City (population: 22,786)</i>	<i>\$6,500</i>	<i>\$4,500</i>
<i>Fairfax County, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 1,016,483)</i>	<i>\$75,000</i>	<i>\$75,000</i>
<i>Loudoun, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 269,605)</i>	<i>\$50,000</i>	<i>\$41,200</i>
<i>Prince William, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 369,216)</i>	<i>\$46,387</i>	<i>\$40,730</i>

***Salaries of Chairs and Members of School Boards***

<b><i>Locality</i></b>	<b><i>School Board Chair</i></b>	<b><i>Board Members</i></b>
<i>Alexandria</i>	<i>\$17,000</i>	<i>\$15,000</i>
<i>Arlington</i>	<i>\$21,500</i>	<i>\$19,500</i>
<i>Fairfax City</i>	<i>\$2,300</i>	<i>\$1,800</i>
<i>Fairfax County</i>	<i>\$13,000</i>	<i>\$12,000</i>
<i>Loudoun</i>	<i>\$14,400</i>	<i>\$12,000</i>
<i>Prince William</i>	<i>\$13,100</i>	<i>\$12,000</i>

## Appendix 1

### THE COMMITTEE CREATED TO REVIEW THE ELECTION PROCESS FOR ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL AND THE SCHOOL BOARD

### ISSUES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

*In March 2007, Mayor William D. Euille appointed the following City residents to a committee to review the election process for Mayor, City Council, and the School Board, and related issues: Richard Hobson (who serves as Chair), Becky Davies (who serves as Vice Chair), Robert L. Calhoun, Christopher M. Campagna, Lynnwood Campbell, William C. "Bill" Cleveland, Iris Henley, Anna Leider, and Joyce Woodson. The Committee was asked to examine and make recommendations on possible options to move City elections from May to November; create staggered terms for Council and the School Board; and revise Council and School Board compensation, based upon comparability with other jurisdictions in the region as well as issues related to these items.*

*Since 1973, the Alexandria City Charter has provided for Mayoral and City Council elections to be held every three years on the second Tuesday in May. School Board elections have been held on the same schedule since 1994. The Constitution and Code of Virginia allow cities such as Alexandria to hold elections for Mayor, City Council and the School Board in May or November. Terms of office can run from one to four years in length. The Code specifies that elections and terms for School Board members must be the same as those for City Council.*

*The Committee has met several times, and has prepared the following document for public reaction. For each issue, the document gives some background, describes current City practice, any changes to that practice that are under consideration, and arguments for and against the changes. The Committee invites members of the public to respond to the issues set out in the document at the Committee's public hearing on June 2 at 10 a.m. in the Council Chambers in City Hall, or by e-mail or in writing.*

*Please send written comments to Bernard Caton, Room 3400, Alexandria City Hall, 301 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; comments may also be sent by e-mail to [bernard.caton@alexandriava.gov](mailto:bernard.caton@alexandriava.gov) ). Comments that are being sent by e-mail, U.S. mail, or hand-delivered, other than those submitted at the public hearing, are due by 5 p.m. on June 1.*

*Commenters are asked to address each issue on which they wish to comment separately, since it is anticipated that some commenters may support some changes but not others (e.g., they may support staggered terms, but oppose moving elections to November).*

*Individuals who speak at the public hearing will be asked to limit their comments to no more than 4 minutes; those representing groups will be asked to limit their comments to no more than 6 minutes (although the chair will retain discretion to change these time limits if warranted). Those speaking at the public hearing are also encouraged to submit written comments.*

*Following the public hearing, the Committee will review the information it receives and meet again to determine what its recommendations will be.*

*Please call Bernard Caton, the City's Legislative Director (703-838-3828), if you have questions about the Committee or its work.*

**Should Council and School Board elections be moved to November?  
If so, should the 3-year term be extended to 4 years?**

- Currently, the Mayor, the 6 members of Alexandria City Council, and the 9 members of the Alexandria School Board are elected to 3-year terms. Elections are held in May; the most recent ones were in May 2006.
- In 2000, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that allows, but does not require, city and town councils to move their Mayor, Council, and School Board elections to November.
- Since the General Assembly authorized November elections, at least 11 cities and a number of towns in Virginia have changed their elections from May to November. While most of these are smaller cities (population 40,000 and below), 3 larger cities—Virginia Beach, Richmond and Suffolk—have also made this change.
- If Council and School Board elections are moved to November and three-year terms are retained, the elections will periodically be at the same time and on the same ballot as various state and national elections. If the next Council/School Board election were moved to November but stayed on the same 3-year cycle, Alexandria voters in November 2009 would be voting for Virginia's Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General; a member of the House of Delegates; Sheriff and Commonwealth's Attorney; the Mayor, the Council, and the School Board. At the next local election, in November 2012, voters would be asked to select a President and Vice President, a U.S. Senator, a member of the U. S. House of Representatives, the Mayor, the Council, and the School Board.
- If the term of the Mayor, Council, and School Board were extended to 4 years (which would require General Assembly approval of a Charter change), these elections could be timed to coincide with major national elections (as in 2012), major state elections (as noted above in 2009), or years in which elections that are greater or lesser in number. In November 2007, for instance, Alexandria voters will be asked to choose only a State Senator and a State Delegate. In November 2010, the only office now scheduled for election is the U.S. House of Representatives.

***Arguments for moving elections to November:***

- *Voter turnout in November is usually at least two or three times what it is in May, so more voters would be voting for members of City Council and the School Board.*
- *Elections can be timed to avoid the presidential election years, when local issues would be overshadowed (local elections held every third November would coincide with a presidential election every 12 years).*
- *New Council and School Board members elected to 4-year terms would have more time to get experience before having to run for re-election.*

***Arguments against moving elections to November:***

- *May elections focus on local issues; November voters would include those who may be less informed about and attentive to local issues.*
- *May elections occur immediately after the adoption of the City budget, when voters are focused on local issues.*
- *Candidates for local office may face added expense and difficulty in obtaining voter support in a crowded field of state or federal candidates.*
- *Voters in November may include more straight ticket (partisan) voters rather than those concerned about local issues.*
- *Neighborhood civic associations tend to “gear up” for the year in the Fall and may not be able to focus on November elections.*

***Arguments against extending the Council and School Board terms to 4 years if elections are moved to November:***

- *Voters would have to wait longer to replace Council or School Board members that they believe are performing poorly or supporting inappropriate policies.*

### **Should Council and School Board terms be staggered?**

- Currently, the Mayor and all members of Council and the School Board run for office at the same time for three-year terms.
- For City Council, this usually results in voters choosing among 10 to 15 candidates for the 6 Council votes they may cast.
- Some localities in Virginia "stagger" the election of their Councils or Boards so that not all members are chosen at once.
- In Arlington, which is governed by a 5-member Board, voters select one Board member, who runs in the County at-large, every November, except that every fourth year, they select two. In Newport News, half the City Council is elected, by district, every other year for a four-year term. In Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William, all Board members are selected at the same time; but they are elected by district, not county-wide (although the Chairman of the Board in each of these counties is elected county-wide).

### ***Arguments for having staggered terms for Council and School Board members:***

- *Staggering the election of Council and School Board members (e.g., having two Council members and three School Board members elected each year to a 3-year term) may increase voter interest by allowing voters to focus on fewer candidates in each election.*
- *Staggering elections so that they occur annually allows voters to focus on issues every year, rather than every 3 years.*
- *Staggering elections prevents the Council and the School Board from having a huge turnover in any one election, thereby ensuring that the elected body will have greater experience and institutional memory.*
- *Staggering elections allows for greater continuity of policy, rather than radical policy swings.*
- *Staggered terms makes raising money simpler and may create a less costly race if the election is held in the Spring, although they may also generate ~~more~~ expense.*
- *Staggered terms may allow organized groups to dictate who runs and who wins elections. Staggered terms may make it easier for these organized groups to oppose individual candidates, to prevent voters from being able to vote in the general election for those whom they wish to elect. Staggered terms may also make it difficult for a political "outsider" to wage a successful campaign for a party's nomination.*

*Arguments against having staggered terms for Council and School Board members:*

- *Staggered terms prevent voters from overturning an entire Council or School Board when voters object to the Council or School Board's policies.*
- *Three-year staggered terms with a Council and School Board election each year increase the number of Council and School Board elections by a multiple of three.*

**Should any or all Council members be elected by district?  
If so, how would the City be divided into districts?**

- During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Alexandria had a bicameral (two-part) legislative body (Council), elected by wards. In 1922, the bicameral body was abolished and replaced with a five-member city council and a city manager. The City changed to a nine-member council in 1932, with six members elected by ward, and three at-large. In 1948, the City changed to a council of seven members, all elected at large. This system remains in place today.
- Some Virginia cities and counties, such as Norfolk, Newport News, and Fairfax County, elect their local representatives by wards or districts. Others, such as Fairfax City and Lynchburg, elect their entire Council from the City at large.
- While most other localities in Virginia with electoral districts divide the locality into districts (or wards) so that each district elects one council or board member, there are variations to this practice. The City of Norfolk, for instance, elects its Mayor at large, two council members from “super districts,” each of which is comprised of half the City, and five Council members from districts which are each made up of approximately one-fifth of the City.
- The Alexandria School Board is already elected by district. The three districts each elect three members to the nine-member Board. Any changes in the electoral process that would result in Council and School Board elections not conforming with each other (e.g., if School Board candidates were to continue to be elected from 3 districts, but Council members were elected from 6 districts) would require legislative approval by the Virginia General Assembly.

***Arguments for having Council members elected by districts:***

- *Residents may be more inclined to turn out and vote for someone representing their area of the City rather than the City as a whole.*
- *Some people believe that voters can better communicate their needs to individual Council members if Council members are elected by district.*
- *Some residents who find it difficult financially and otherwise to run citywide may find it easier and less expensive to run in a district within the City.*

***Arguments against having Council members elected by districts:***

- *A Council member who is elected from a district may be more likely to look after the interests of the residents of his or her district, and not the City as a whole.*
- *Election of Council members by district increases the chances of members trading support for local district-oriented issues rather than considering City wide interests.*



- *It may be more difficult to get good Council candidates in districts than in the City as a whole.*

*If the City were to elect its Council members by district, how would you want those districts to be drawn up (e.g., would you prefer 3 districts with 2 Council members from each district; 6 districts with one Council member from each district; some Council members running in districts and some at large)?*

*Should any change be made in the number of School Board members (now 9)?*

### **Should Council elections be non-partisan?**

- In Virginia, localities generally can choose whether or not to hold City Council and County Board races on a partisan basis (i.e., allow candidates to run under a party label).
- The practices of Alexandria's neighboring localities vary. Some have non-partisan elections, such as the Cities of Fairfax and Falls Church. Our larger Virginia neighbors (the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William) all have partisan elections.
- Virginia law requires school board elections to be non-partisan, but does allow political parties to endorse school board candidates (Arlington County follows this practice).
- There are certain limits on participation by federal employees in partisan elections. While they are not precluded from running, they cannot seek or publicize a party's endorsement.

#### ***Arguments for making Council elections non-partisan:***

- *Federal employees would find it easier to mount campaigns for City Council. There are large numbers of highly qualified federal government employees that are not able to run for Council without the threat of violating the Hatch Act.*
- *Candidates that do not necessarily identify with either political party would find it easier to run for office.*

#### ***Arguments against making Council elections non-partisan:***

- *Both the major political parties have provided a service to the electorate by recruiting candidates for City Council.*
- *The option of endorsement by political parties will permit de facto partisan political contests.*
- *Partisan council elections promote partisan cooperation between office holders of the same political party.*

**Should Council and School Board compensation be increased?**

- Alexandria's Mayor and Council Members have received their current salaries (shown in the table below with salaries for other elected officials in Northern Virginia) since July 1, 2003. Under Virginia law, these salaries cannot be increased before July 1, 2009.
- Alexandria School Board salaries were set at their current level as of July 1, 2007 (they are shown below with those of other Northern Virginia school boards), and cannot be increased before July 1, 2009.
- The Elections Committee has been asked to recommend whether there should be an increase to the salaries of the Mayor, Council members, and School Board members.

***Salaries of Mayors, Chairs and Council and Board Members***

<b>Locality</b>	<b>Mayor/Chair</b>	<b>Council/Board Member</b>
Alexandria (population: 132,343)	\$30,500	\$27,500
Arlington, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 194,358)	\$53,900	\$49,000
Fairfax City (population: 22,786)	\$6,500	\$4,500
Fairfax County, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 1,016,483)	\$75,000	\$75,000
Loudoun, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 269,605)	\$50,000	\$41,200
Prince William, beginning 1/1/08 (population: 369,216)	\$46,387	\$40,730

***Salaries of Chairs and Members of School Boards***

<b>Locality</b>	<b>School Board Chair</b>	<b>Board Members</b>
Alexandria (population: 132,343)	\$17,000	\$15,000
Arlington (population: 194,358)	\$21,500	\$19,500
Fairfax City (population: 22,786)	\$2,300	\$1,800
Fairfax County (population: 1,016,483)	\$13,000	\$12,000
Loudoun (population: 269,605)	\$14,400	\$12,000
Prince William (population: 369,216)	\$13,100	\$12,000

***Arguments for increasing the salaries of the Mayor, the School Board Chair, and the other members of City Council and the School Board:***

- *Some people believe that low salaries tend to draw candidates who are wealthy, retired, or have independent means of support. Higher salaries would make it easier for the average resident to serve on Council.*

***Arguments against increasing the salaries of the Mayor, the School Board Chair, and the other members of City Council and the School Board:***

- *High salaries for part-time elected officials tend to create a class of professional politician.*
- *Council already has the authority to set compensation and that issue should be decided by that body.*

**Appendix 2**  
**Summary of Comments to the Elections Committee**

Should Council and School Board elections be moved to November?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	No—I think the elections should stay in the Spring to keep the focus on local issues. In November, I believe we would see more straight ticket election votes.
Bob Hardiman	Yes. The increased turnout makes the move well worth it. The argument that some voters in November would focus less on local issues is spurious. Those voters would be equally less focused in a May election if they even bothered to turn out.
Carlyle Ring	No—I do not favor moving the elections to November. Local elections may become overshadowed by national and state elections. May turnout is lower, but May voters are more informed and care deeply about the City.
J. H. Eisenhower	Yes—Schedule Council and School Board elections in November in Leap Year plus 3, with an orderly transition process to get us to this schedule.
Don Mela	No—Keep the council elections separate from state and federal elections. To register and to vote are easier now than ever. I do not believe we will get better government if we bring to the polls a group of people who have “voted with their feet”, indicating their lack of interest in our municipal affairs. The data indicate that change to November would increase the Democratic party’s vote substantially, but I believe that a competitive two-party system results in better government.
S. Dreikorn	No—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. Therefore, I urge the committee to continue local elections in May.
M. Lang	No—Many people who would be attracted to the State and Federal elections would not be knowledgeable concerning local issues but would vote nevertheless because they were there.
J. Starkey	Yes—Move local elections to November in a year we vote for neither president nor governor. We are more tuned to voting in November. It makes sense to have local offices on the same ballot.
J. Sullivan	Yes—I agree with J. Eisenhower.
J. Wilson	Yes—One of the most effective ways to increase participation and turnout in our elections is to move our municipal elections to November.
B. Ely	No Elections should continue to be held in May so that they do not get lost in the fog of the federal and state elections in November.
K. DeYoung	No—Leave elections in May to focus on City issues.
A. Fisher	No—Leave things as they are.
P. Troy	No—Leave things as they are.
B. Schultze	No—May elections can focus on local issues.
T. Raycroft	No. Local elections would be overshadowed by federal and state elections in November; a long November ballot would lead to “ballot fatigue”; May elections allow Council members to be held accountable for the budget; it would be difficult for candidates to get contributions and volunteers for a November election.
L. White	No—Moving elections to November would result in them getting mixed up in national issues.
J. Miller	No—Local candidates and issues would get lost in November elections.
L. Miller	Moving elections to November would not help with turnout.
D. Fromm	Wants no changes in the election process until a survey asks residents why they do not vote.
T. Van Fleet	No—November elections will eliminate the focus on City issues that exist with May elections.
K. Canady	No—Don’t make local candidates compete with other candidates.
B. Hendrickson	No—Consider other ideas to increase civic participation.
M. Hobbs	No—Local candidates and issues would be overshadowed by national and state ones.
B. Walker	Yes—This will encourage more participation, and voters will become more educated by their participation. Local elections should be coupled with the State cycle.

If so, should the 3-year term be extended to 4 years?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	Yes—Extending the term to 4 years provides for more governance and less campaigning.
Bob Hardiman	No, absolutely not. The U.S. House works on a two year cycle. Politicians are political. Realistically, both Council and Board rely heavily--almost exclusively--on their very high quality staffs for continuity. Arguments for the need for longer terms for the purposes of greater continuity and experience are specious.
J. H. Eisenhower	Yes—Extend Council and School Board terms to four years.
S. Dreikorn	No—To give the elected officials a three year hiatus between elections is risky; to expand it to four is dangerous. Ultimately, I urge you to shorten the three year terms to two years
J. Sullivan	Yes—He agrees with J. Eisenhower.
D. Fromm	Yes, if the elections are shifted to November. They should be placed in the odd years away from the distraction of national elections and major state elections.
A. Fisher	No—Leave things as they are.
P. Troy	No—Leave terms at 3 years, or change to 2.
B. Schultze	He supports consideration of a 4-year term.
J. Crenshaw VF	No—reduce terms to 2 years.
J. Miller	No—Leave things as they are.
B. Walker	Yes—Extend Council terms to four years.

Should Council and School Board terms be staggered?

Commenter	Comment
Bob Hardiman	No, absolutely not. Realistically, both Council and Board rely heavily—almost exclusively—on their very high quality staffs for continuity, institutional memory and experience. Keeping the elections all at one time increases accountability of the politicians with no opportunity to use as an excuse that the problems are those not running.
Carlyle Ring	No—I favor elections of the entire Council as its results generally in more diversity on Council. Head-to-head races are subject to domination by one group. Healthy dialogue of public policy is more likely to occur when there is diversity in representation.
J. H. Eisenhower	No—Voters already suffer election fatigue and it would be necessary to retain May as well as November general elections to pull this off.
S. Dreikorn	No--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.
M. Lang	No—If local elections continue to be in May and the terms remain the same there is no need to stagger them. The electorate would tire of almost yearly elections. The electorate also needs to have the opportunity to make a complete turnover of its elected officials.
J. Starkey	No—I can't imagine the distress this would cause the Electoral Board.
J. Sullivan	No—I agree with J. Eisenhower.
B. Ely	If the City switches to 4-year Council terms, have one Council member elected from each district every 2 years. No need to stagger terms if 3-year terms are to continue, but in that case, in each Council district, there should be 2 separate elections – one for that district's Seat A and the other for that district's Seat B. A comparable arrangement should be made for the school board, with each seat separately contested.
D. Fromm	No—Staggered elections risk election fatigue, and could cause more policy swings. Given the length of time it takes to get development projects through the city's processes, staggered terms may allow single issue candidates to win for purely emotional reasons.
P. Troy	No—Keep things as they are.
T. Raycroft	If elections were moved to November (which he opposes), staggered elections may be preferable.
K. Canady	No—Staggered terms are an “abomination” and would reduce responsiveness to the electorate.
B. Walker	It may be good to stagger terms.

Should any or all Council members be elected by district?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	Yes—I think we should have the Mayor and two members of Council elected at large, with two members elected in each of the three School Board Districts -- for a total of nine Council members. I've participated in Council and School Board elections. The at-large process seems to dictate winners only from those candidates closely plugged into the existing political machine in this City -- which amazes me. Ordinary citizens who would make good representatives of their neighborhoods don't stand a chance city-wide. In district elections, we may see fresh talent rise up.
Bob Hardiman	No, absolutely not. Election city wide means that not only will more capable people be tempted to run, but that those elected will have to consider what is best for the city as a whole, not for their particular area. It eliminates the political horse-trading of "I'll vote for you and your district if you will vote for me and mine!"
J. H. Eisenhower	No—The last thing this city needs is to enhance neighborhood competition by electing Council persons by district or some combination of districts and members at large. We should consider abolishing the district system for electing School Board members.
S. Dreikorn	No—It is 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.
M. Lang	Yes—Council members should be elected by district, making every part of the City represented on Council and no one area of the City dominating the Council.
S. Levy	Yes—the current at-large system prevents effective debate prior to elections and lowers the level of civic participation in elections. It also means that some areas of Alexandria are over-represented.
J. Starkey	No. The city is too small in area.
J. Sullivan	Agree with J. Eisenhower that Council elections remain at large, but supports keeping School Board elections by district.
B. Ely	Yes—Establish three Council districts that match the School Board districts.
D. Fromm	No—We already have enough neighborhood parochialism.
K. DeYoung	Yes—A ward system would allow me to know my representative.
A. Fisher	Yes—This would prevent one area from having too many Council members.
P. Troy	Yes, he favors a ward system.
T. Raycroft	This may be a good idea.
J Crenshaw VF	Yes, she favors a ward system.
L. White	No—The focus of all Council members should be Citywide.
J. Miller	No—but maybe change the School Board elections to a hybrid (districts and at-large).
T. Van Fleet	Yes—Have elections by district, or a hybrid combination of district and at-large; same with School Board.
K. Canady	No—Do not have districts for Council or the School Board.
B. Walker	No—Wards would promote parochialism. School Board members should also run at-large.



If so, how would the City be divided into districts?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	I think we should have the Mayor and two members of Council elected at large, with two members elected in each of the three School Board Districts -- for a total of nine Council members. I've participated in Council and School Board elections. The at-large process seems to dictate winners only from those candidates closely plugged into the existing political machine in this City -- which amazes me. Ordinary citizens who would make good representatives of their neighborhoods don't stand a chance city-wide. In district elections, we may see fresh talent rise up.
M. Lang	There should be the same division of districts for Council and School Board. My preference would be 4 districts with one Council member elected from each district and 2 members and the Mayor elected at large. For the School Board, 2 members from each of the districts with the Chairman elected at large. If we continue to have the three School Board districts, then have 2 Council members elected from each district with the Mayor elected at large.
S. Levy	I support dividing the city into six single-member districts. Larger two- or three-member districts are more likely to be dominated by the wealthier parts of the district. There is no purpose in having one member elected at-large. The mayor serves to represent the entire city.
B. Ely	Establish three Council districts that match the School Board districts.
J Crenshaw VF	Use current School Board boundaries with 2 Council members/district; or create 6 districts.

If the City were to elect its Council members by district, how would you want those districts to be drawn up (e.g., would you prefer 3 districts with 2 Council members from each district; 6 districts with one Council member from each district; some Council members running in districts and some at large)?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	I think we should have the Mayor and two members of Council elected at large, with two members elected in each of the three School Board Districts -- for a total of nine Council members. I've participated in Council and School Board elections. The at-large process seems to dictate winners only from those candidates closely plugged into the existing political machine in this City -- which amazes me. Ordinary citizens who would make good representatives of their neighborhoods don't stand a chance city-wide. In district elections, we may see fresh talent rise up.
B. Ely	Establish three Council districts that match the School Board districts.
J Crenshaw VF	Use current School Board boundaries with 2 Council members/district; or create 6 districts.

Should any change be made in the number of School Board members (now 9)?

Commenter	Comment
Bob Hardiman	Yes, reduce to 5, certainly no more than 7. In a city with a population of 132,343 with a declining or stagnant school population, a 9 member board means that each represents about 14,704 residents. For argument's sake, assume that one-third of the population is school age, 44,114; that means that each Board member represents about 4902 students and of course their parents. The questions beg to be asked: To do what? For what purpose? Such a large board only allows governance by committee so that for publicly perceived bad decisions, the blame is always laid on the "Committee (the Board)." Why not reduce the Board ideally to 5, certainly no more than 7, to increase its functioning, effectiveness and accountability without so many members to hide behind.
T. Raycroft	Yes—There are too many Board members now.

Should Council elections be non-partisan?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	I feel VERY STRONGLY that Council elections should be non-partisan, like the school board elections. With all the federal workers living in Alexandria, like me, non-partisan elections could open up the field of candidates to a wider candidate pool. Plus, the candidates can focus on truly local issues rather than catering to the dictates of a political party.
Bob Hardiman	No. Two questions are raised here. The first is the perceived tendency of the independent candidate to be more willing to run; that is an erroneous argument in an area so heavily dominated by one of the major political parties. If they choose to run, they'll run as an independent in whatever type election. The second is the availability of the highly skilled federal employee. The hours required preclude any serving federal employee from effectively functioning as an elected member while still holding their job as a federal employee. Should the federal employee resign their job, the Hatch Act becomes moot as does the need for a no-partisan election to attract such talent.
Carlyle Ring	I favor non-partisan elections because local issues seldom are partisan. There is no such thing as a Republican or a Democratic pothole; it just needs to be fixed. By non-partisan I mean no endorsements as well.
J. H. Eisenhower	No—The only valid problem – federal employee participation – is not much of an issue under modern federal rules and the Falls Church scheme of “non-partisan” organizations seems inappropriate for a city of our size.
Don Mela	Most of the issues facing the City Council in the past have been non-partisan, yet my analyses of several past council elections have shown that the voting follows party lines. I doubt that a change to non-partisan elections would change this.
S. Dreikorn	Yes—With the city council race being a partisan affair, voters are less likely to make decisions based on policy, and more likely to make their decision based on label.
J. Starkey	A splendid idea! I won't go into the reasons.
M. Lang	Yes—At the local level citizens have the opportunity to find out where the nominees stand on issues and should not be voting simply for which party the nominees belong.
J. Sullivan	No—He agrees with J. Eisenhower.
B. Ely	Maintain partisan elections; there is no such thing as a non-partisan election.
Pat Troy	Yes, since City issues are not partisan issues.
B. Schultze	Elections will be defacto partisan, no matter what.
J Crenshaw VF	Yes they should.

Should Council and School Board compensation be increased?

Commenter	Comment
Beth Beck	Salaries for members of Council and School Board are incredibly low. I can't imagine who an individual can afford to take on either job, for all the time and effort to attend all the meetings and appearances and social gatherings required of a representative of the City. Attending hearings for Council and School Board that last until midnight is almost super human. I can't imagine how few pennies they receive for their service when the salary is divided by the hours on the job.
Bob Hardiman	Yes. It is long past time for residents to recognize that the time required for the Mayor, the Council and Board Members to effectively represent them is no longer capable of being done on a part-time, volunteer basis in their spare time. The lengthy hours needed for City business requires adequate compensation such that these politicals' participation does not become a monetary sacrifice for them and their families. Given the complexity and the greater size of Alexandria, the salaries should equal or exceed those of the smaller Arlington.
Carlyle Ring	I believe that salaries should be kept modest. The office should not be sought for its pay but as an opportunity to serve. The higher the pay the greater the expectation and the temptation to micromanage a system that otherwise is designed to be professionally managed.
J. H. Eisenhower	Bottom line - the Mayoral position compensation should probably be increased but the compensation associated with other Council and School Board slots should not.
S. Dreikorn	Compensation is at the discretion of the council, but they need to remember who pays them, and what the repercussions could be.
J. Starkey	Yes for mayor (especially) and council. No for School Board.
J. Sullivan	Agree with J. Eisenhower.
B. Ely	Continue current Council and School Board compensation determination practices, but do not let salaries be raised to the point that someone can live off his or her Council or School Board salary.
D. Fromm	If elections are moved to November and Council meets all year (as I recommended), it should get a raise. Otherwise, there is not enough information to make a recommendation. Council should propose, justify and decide
A. Fisher	If salaries are increased, the increase should not be large.
P. Troy	Yes—a committee should make a recommendation to the City Manager.
T. Raycroft	Yes—Increase either their pay or their staff.
J Crenshaw VF	Compensation should not be high enough that it is seen as a way to earn a living
J. Miller	Increase Council salaries (but not significantly); do not increase School Board salaries.
K. Canady	Increase Council salaries, and maybe School Board salaries.
B. Walker	Yes—Increase Council salaries, and especially the Mayor's.

10  
10-13-07

Jackie Henderson /Alex  
10/15/2007 11:23 AM

To Gloria Sitton/Alex@Alex  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Fw: Comments on City Council Docket Item #10 on 12 October 2007

----- Forwarded by Jackie Henderson /Alex on 10/15/2007 11:23 AM -----



David Fromm or Amy Slack  
<alsdmf@earthlink.net>  
10/12/2007 07:06 PM

To Paul Smedberg <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>, Rob Krupicka <krobk@aol.com>, Bill Euille <alexvamayor@aol.com>, Ludwick Gaines <councilmangaines@aol.com>, Del Pepper <delpepper@aol.com>, Andrew MacDonald <macdonaldcouncil@msn.com>, Tim Lovain <timothylovain@aol.com>  
cc James Hartmann <james.hartmann@alexandriava.gov>, Jackie Henderson <jackie.henderson@alexandriava.gov>  
Subject Comments on City Council Docket Item #10 on 12 October 2007

Note: the attached pdf file contains everything below.

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11 October 2007

Mayor Euille and members of City Council,

Due to another commitment I will be unable to attend the Public Hearing on 12 October 2007 and thus unable to speak to docket item #10 -- "Public Hearing to Obtain Citizen Comment on the Report of the Committee on the Election Process for the Alexandria City Council and the Alexandria School Board. (#25, 6/26/07)".

I support the recommendation that the current process for Council and School Board elections not be changed, but wanted to clearly state my reason.

The primary motivation for the creation of the Committee was a response to low voter turnout in local elections. There was little if any effort made by the Committee to determine why Alexandrians do not come out to vote in local elections. Without such a survey, the majority of the arguments for or against the various points considered in the report are little more than one unsubstantiated opinion versus another made by people who vote.

To summarize my position: We should not change the election process for Council and the School Board until we know why Alexandrians do not come out to vote in local elections.

The Committee's report includes brief summaries of my recommendations on their various proposals, but did not include my letter to the Committee that argued primarily for getting the facts before we take any action. I have attached that letter below,

Sincerely,  
David Fromm  
2307 E Randolph Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22301  
703-549-3412  
alsdmf@earthlink.net

-----  
□2 June 2007

Chairman Hobson and members of the committee,

When I review the history of this committee, I find that the main reason for its creation was framed in several opinion pieces written by City Councilmember Rob Krupicka from May to July of 2006. In those writings, he lamented about the low voter turnout for the City Council elections and suggested that we should move them to November to take advantage of the natural "higher" voter turnout that occurs then. He addressed several of the criticisms that tend to be offered against such a move. His remarks also led to the idea of staggered terms. But the overarching concern was low voter participation.

When Mayor Euille formed this committee, you were charged with evaluating the shifting of the elections to November and the implementation of staggered terms. But it seems that the issue of low voter turnout, why it occurs in Alexandria, and what can be done about it was not the main focus of your charter. Now I did not attend all of your meetings, but based on those I attended and the documents and meeting minutes I've seen, I would say this is a fair assessment. As far as I can tell, there was not one study considered of why people don't vote in local elections. To be fair, there are very few such studies in America, although according to my web search the Alexandria League of Women Voters did one prior to 2002 that found, "Because of the diversity of the Alexandria community, their electorate contained many more of the demographic populations less likely to vote in any election." (League of Women Voters of Wilmette, <http://www.lwvwilmette.org/nonvoterstudy.html>). Also, as far as I can tell, none of the studies of why people don't vote in national elections or what can be done about it were considered either.

Consequently the document prepared for this hearing really does not address the issue of low voter participation. Shifting elections to November simply moves us from a locally embarrassing 20% turnout to the nationally embarrassing 50% turnout - the second lowest of the world's democracies. I guess doing so allows us to relax and wait until some national study finally finds the solution.

Thus the only recommendation I want to see from this committee concerning the election process is: "This committee believes that no changes to the City's election process be considered until a survey is completed of why so many of the registered voters choose not to participate." I hold that without such a survey, discussions of the various points in the document prepared for this hearing are nothing more than one unsubstantiated opinion versus another. A concise summary of similar opinions from the academic world can already be found on Wikipedia on the web.

One way to see that shifting the City Council election's to November is really little more than a feel good exercise is to consider the last election results. The number of votes for democratic candidates out numbered republican candidates two to one. Essentially that means that

the City Council was really selected by only 1,695 voters, that is, the number of people that voted in the democratic caucus. It is difficult to see how shifting the election to November would affect this truth of politics in Alexandria. It really raises the question of who, in fact, will benefit from changing the current election process without bona fide efforts to truly involve the electorate.

I've already given my primary recommendation - First do the survey! - but I'll quickly comment on the key proposals in the document prepared for this hearing.

My second recommendation is that if elections are shifted to November then City Council and all of the key commissions (Planning, BZA, BAR, etc) should meet throughout the year. Currently, due to the summer hiatus, the months of September and October tend to have a high number of important issues requiring the attention of the citizens and civic groups. The distraction of City Council elections, candidate debates, etc will not benefit the various planning and decision processes in the city without removing the special significance of the months of September and October. Personally, I like having a summer respite, so I am not in favor of moving the Council elections to November.

My third recommendation is if the elections are shifted to November, then we should go to four year terms. This way the local elections can be placed in the odd years away from the distraction of national elections and perhaps major state elections.

Fourth, I don't prefer staggered elections. I think it risks election fatigue. Also, it could actually cause more policy swings. Given the length of time it takes to get development projects through the city's processes, I think staggered terms raise the risk of single issue candidates winning for purely emotional reasons. Also, based on the political reality in the City and the pictures of past Council's hanging on the walls, I don't think we have any risk of losing the corporate memory in any one election. If we go to staggered terms, I definitely recommend four year terms so we have at least two years with some kind of continuity without a Council election.

Fifth, I don't support dividing the City into districts. We already have enough neighborhood parochialism.

Sixth, concerning Council's salary: If my second recommendation is adopted and Council needs to meet all year, then they probably should get a raise. Otherwise, I don't think you have enough information to make a recommendation. Council should be the ones to propose, justify and decide.

I have no comments concerning the school board, as one can only follow so much in the City and I'll leave that to those who are better informed and most affected.

Finally I would note that none of my recommendations other than the first really address the issue of low voter participation, so I reiterate - Do the survey first, then we can have a real discussion!

To close, I did find the history of the past forms of city government and corresponding election processes interesting. I wish you had included some of the reasons for the changes. It is difficult to believe it was due to having an award-winning city with a AAA bond rating and various programs that are considered as models to be emulated. Given the status of things in the City, the history of our



City and the influential people that have lived here over the centuries, I would hope that if we are going to alter the election process and other aspects of how we are governed that we find solutions that are uniquely Alexandrian, that truly serve our needs, and are nationally acknowledged as models for others.

Sincerely,  
David Fromm  
2307 East Randolph Avenue  
703-5449-3412  
alsdmf@earthlink.net



DFromm\_comments\_on\_docket\_item\_10.pdf

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*


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10  
10-13-07

MEMORANDUM

DATE: OCTOBER 2, 2007

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: FISCAL IMPACT OF A RECOMMENDATION FOR FULL-TIME COUNCIL AIDES FROM THE COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE ELECTION PROCESS

---

**ISSUE:** Fiscal Impact of a Recommendation for Full-time Council Aides from the Committee to Review the Election Process.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council receive this report.

**DISCUSSION:** On June 26, 2007, City Council received the report of the Committee appointed by the Mayor to Review the Election Process for the City Council and the School Board. Council docketed the report for public hearing on October 13, 2007.

One of the Committee's recommendations was that staff assistance for the Mayor and Council be increased (for Council Members, from the current 0.5 FTE per Member to 1.0 FTE per Member; and for the Mayor, from the current 1.0 FTE to 1.5 FTE). Council asked staff for information on the cost of implementing this proposal prior to the public hearing.

The current cost for the Mayor's two aides (who together represent one FTE) and 6 half-time Council aides is \$179,238 for salaries and \$24,576 for benefits.

If the Mayor were given 1.5 FTE for aides and each Council member 1.0 FTE, and if Council member aides were made classified employees at approximately the same place on the pay scale as they would be if they were now full-time, the salary cost for all 7.5 FTE's would be \$330,285, and benefits would be an additional \$129,895 (the substantial increase in the cost of benefits is due primarily to the increased costs for retirement and health insurance). The proposed change would require an increase of \$256,366 to funds now budgeted for aides for the Mayor and Council.

**STAFF:**

Bernard Caton, Legislative Director

Michael Stewart, Budget/Management Analyst

10  
10-13-07

Jackie Henderson /Alex

10/15/2007 11:23 AM

To Gloria Sitton/Alex@Alex

cc

bcc

Subject Fw: Comments on City Council Docket Item #10 on 12 October 2007

----- Forwarded by Jackie Henderson /Alex on 10/15/2007 11:23 AM -----



David Fromm or Amy Slack  
<alsdmf@earthlink.net>

10/12/2007 07:06 PM

To Paul Smedberg <paulcsmedberg@aol.com>, Rob Krupicka  
<krobk@aol.com>, Bill Euille <alexvamayor@aol.com>,  
Ludwick Gaines <councilmangaines@aol.com>, Del Pepper  
<delpepper@aol.com>, Andrew MacDonald  
<macdonaldcouncil@msn.com>, Tim Lovain  
<timothylovain@aol.com>

cc James Hartmann <james.hartmann@alexandriava.gov>,  
Jackie Henderson <jackie.henderson@alexandriava.gov>

Subject Comments on City Council Docket Item #10 on 12 October 2007

Note: the attached pdf file contains everything below.

-----  
11 October 2007

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When Mayor Euille formed this committee, you were charged with evaluating the shifting of the elections to November and the implementation of staggered terms. But it seems that the issue of low voter turnout, why it occurs in Alexandria, and what can be done about it was not the main focus of your charter. Now I did not attend all of your meetings, but based on those I attended and the documents and meeting minutes I've seen, I would say this is a fair assessment. As far as I can tell, there was not one study considered of why people don't vote in local elections. To be fair, there are very few such studies in America, although according to my web search the Alexandria League of Women Voters did one prior to 2002 that found, "Because of the diversity of the Alexandria community, their electorate contained many more of the demographic populations less likely to vote in any election." (League of Women Voters of Wilmette, <http://www.lwvwilmette.org/nonvoterstudy.html>). Also, as far as I can tell, none of the studies of why people don't vote in national elections or what can be done about it were considered either.

Consequently the document prepared for this hearing really does not address the issue of low voter participation. Shifting elections to November simply moves us from a locally embarrassing 20% turnout to the nationally embarrassing 50% turnout - the second lowest of the world's democracies. I guess doing so allows us to relax and wait until some national study finally finds the solution.

Thus the only recommendation I want to see from this committee concerning the election process is: "This committee believes that no changes to the City's election process be considered until a survey is completed of why so many of the registered voters choose not to participate." I hold that without such a survey, discussions of the various points in the document prepared for this hearing are nothing more than one unsubstantiated opinion versus another. A concise summary of similar opinions from the academic world can already be found on Wikipedia on the web.

One way to see that shifting the City Council election's to November is really little more than a feel good exercise is to consider the last election results. The number of votes for democratic candidates out numbered republican candidates two to one. Essentially that means that

the City Council was really selected by only 1,695 voters, that is, the number of people that voted in the democratic caucus. It is difficult to see how shifting the election to November would affect this truth of politics in Alexandria. It really raises the question of who, in fact, will benefit from changing the current election process without bona fide efforts to truly involve the electorate.

I've already given my primary recommendation - First do the survey! - but I'll quickly comment on the key proposals in the document prepared for this hearing.

My second recommendation is that if elections are shifted to November then City Council and all of the key commissions (Planning, BZA, BAR, etc) should meet throughout the year. Currently, due to the summer hiatus, the months of September and October tend to have a high number of important issues requiring the attention of the citizens and civic groups. The distraction of City Council elections, candidate debates, etc will not benefit the various planning and decision processes in the city without removing the special significance of the months of September and October. Personally, I like having a summer respite, so I am not in favor of moving the Council elections to November.

My third recommendation is if the elections are shifted to November, then we should go to four year terms. This way the local elections can be placed in the odd years away from the distraction of national elections and perhaps major state elections.

Fourth, I don't prefer staggered elections. I think it risks election fatigue. Also, it could actually cause more policy swings. Given the length of time it takes to get development projects through the city's processes, I think staggered terms raise the risk of single issue candidates winning for purely emotional reasons. Also, based on the political reality in the City and the pictures of past Council's hanging on the walls, I don't think we have any risk of losing the corporate memory in any one election. If we go to staggered terms, I definitely recommend four year terms so we have at least two years with some kind of continuity without a Council election.

Fifth, I don't support dividing the City into districts. We already have enough neighborhood parochialism.

Sixth, concerning Council's salary: If my second recommendation is adopted and Council needs to meet all year, then they probably should get a raise. Otherwise, I don't think you have enough information to make a recommendation. Council should be the ones to propose, justify and decide.

I have no comments concerning the school board, as one can only follow so much in the City and I'll leave that to those who are better informed and most affected.

Finally I would note that none of my recommendations other than the first really address the issue of low voter participation, so I reiterate - Do the survey first, then we can have a real discussion!

To close, I did find the history of the past forms of city government and corresponding election processes interesting. I wish you had included some of the reasons for the changes. It is difficult to believe it was due to having an award-winning city with a AAA bond rating and various programs that are considered as models to be emulated. Given the status of things in the City, the history of our

City and the influential people that have lived here over the centuries, I would hope that if we are going to alter the election process and other aspects of how we are governed that we find solutions that are uniquely Alexandrian, that truly serve our needs, and are nationally acknowledged as models for others.

Sincerely,  
David Fromm  
2307 East Randolph Avenue  
703-5449-3412  
alsdmf@earthlink.net



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2 June 2007

Chairman Hobson and members of the committee,

When I review the history of this committee, I find that the main reason for its creation was framed in several opinion pieces written by City Councilmember Rob Krupicka from May to July of 2006. In those writings, he lamented about the low voter turnout for the City Council elections and suggested that we should move them to November to take advantage of the natural “higher” voter turnout that occurs then. He addressed several of the criticisms that tend to be offered against such a move. His remarks also led to the idea of staggered terms. But the overarching concern was low voter participation.

When Mayor Euille formed this committee, you were charged with evaluating the shifting of the elections to November and the implementation of staggered terms. But it seems that the issue of low voter turnout, why it occurs in Alexandria, and what can be done about it was not the main focus of your charter. Now I did not attend all of your meetings, but based on those I attended and the documents and meeting minutes I’ve seen, I would say this is a fair assessment. As far as I can tell, there was not one study considered of why people don’t vote in local elections. To be fair, there are very few such studies in America, although according to my web search the Alexandria League of Women Voters did one prior to 2002 that found, “Because of the diversity of the Alexandria community, their electorate contained many more of the demographic populations less likely to vote in any election.” (League of Women Voters of Wilmette, <http://www.lwvwilmette.org/nonvoterstudy.html>). Also, as far as I can tell, none of the studies of why people don’t vote in national elections or what can be done about it were considered either.

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Sincerely,  
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11 October 2007

Mayor Euille and members of City Council,

Due to another commitment I will be unable to attend the Public Hearing on 12 October 2007 and thus unable to speak to docket item #10 -- "Public Hearing to Obtain Citizen Comment on the Report of the Committee on the Election Process for the Alexandria City Council and the Alexandria School Board. (#25, 6/26/07)".

I support the recommendation that the current process for Council and School Board elections not be changed, but wanted to clearly state my reason.

The primary motivation for the creation of the Committee was a response to low voter turnout in local elections. There was little if any effort made by the Committee to determine why Alexandrians do not come out to vote in local elections. Without such a survey, the majority of the arguments for or against the various points considered in the report are little more than one unsubstantiated opinion versus another made by people who vote.

To summarize my position: We should not change the election process for Council and the School Board until we know why Alexandrians do not come out to vote in local elections.

The Committee's report includes brief summaries of my recommendations on their various proposals, but did not include my letter to the Committee that argued primarily for getting the facts before we take any action. I have attached that letter below,

Sincerely,  
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