



City of Long Beach
Working Together to Serve

Office of Gerrie Schipske
Councilwoman, Fifth District
Memorandum

Date: July 6, 2010

To: Charter Amendment Committee

From: Councilwoman Gerrie Schipske, Fifth District

Subject: AGENDA ITEM: Proposed Charter Amendment Moving Municipal Elections to November

DISCUSSION

The current City Charter establishes municipal elections be conducted in the following manner:

Sec. 1901. - PRIMARY AND GENERAL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

The primary and general municipal elections for elective officers of the City shall be held in even numbered years, on the second Tuesday in April and the first Tuesday after the first Monday in June, respectively, and candidates elected to office shall assume such office on the third Tuesday in July and serve until election and qualification of their successors.

Only those elected offices shall be filled which become vacant on the third Tuesday in July of that year.

April Primaries:

Historically, the practice of April primaries in Long Beach City Council elections comes from council candidates having to run from a district and then be elected at large by all voters. When this practice was eliminated and district elections implemented, the primary and general elections remained.

In most council districts, the voter turn-out is below 25 percent in the April Primary. This is due to many factors, including those years in which Presidential primaries have occurred in March, making the election cycle even longer: March, April, June and November.

An April primary election and a June run-off also adds to the costs both to the City and to candidates who must raise and spend money for two campaign cycles.

November Election Winner Take All:

Consolidating City elections with the state general election in November would increase voter turn-out dramatically as evidenced in numerous studies of voter behavior in California municipal elections. (See http://weber.ucsd.edu/~zhajnal/page1/page2/files/page2_3.pdf)

“ELECTION CONCURRENCY: TIMING IS ALMOST EVERYTHING

Why do some cities have much higher participation rates than others? The short answer is timing.” **MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS AND VOTER TURNOUT IN LOCAL ELECTIONS**, URBAN AFFAIRS REVIEW, Vol. 38, No. 5, May 2003 645-668.

Consolidating City elections with the state general election in November would also reduce administrative costs to the City of Long Beach; a reason many cities have changed the timing of their elections.

What makes timing even more appealing as a policy lever is that many cities have actively considered changes to the timing of their elections, and there are strong incentives—aside from increasing participation—to switch to concurrent elections. In fact, the primary motivation for this move has usually been cost savings. In California, for example, municipalities typically pay the entire administrative costs of stand-alone elections but only a fraction of the costs of on-cycle elections. Our survey indicates that in California, more than 40% of cities have changed the timing of municipal elections in recent years, with the vast majority of those switching from stand-alone elections to elections concurrent with statewide contests. Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION

Motion to approve the referral to the City Attorney for placement on the November 2010 ballot, a Charter Amendment to conduct city elections concurrent with November general statewide elections.