

Task Force on Elected Representation Meeting Minutes for 10/1eight/19

Attendees Present:

Doug Matthews
Nadine Klein
Rick Baker
Jack Hoffman
John Schaut
Joel Hondorp
Rina Baker
Bonnie Burke
Joe Marogil
Danielle Williams
Christine Helms-Maletic

1. General Updates

The decision was made to go straight to presentations

2. Presentations

Empower the Citizens (Rina & Bonnie)

Bonnie: Odd year would allow savings, would increase voting 3-4 times versus the even year. The people who do not vote, they primarily don't vote in the primary as well.

An even year would extend the elected official term for an additional year. However, it would offset the cost, the county would cover the even year cost voter turnout would higher.

Lack of voting due to lack of knowledge of issues, too many things on the ballad?? (Ballad Fatigue).
About 40% of voters in the primary election voted for representatives but not on

Rina: Positive response to switching election year, they've signed both petitions. They've collected 6,000 signatures. People have taken time to listen, disabled individuals are calling their power of attorneys to sign this position, they're invited in those collecting signatures to further discuss the switch to even year elections.

Voters expressed concerns as to why this wasn't done before and why other cities are automatically switching over to even years and why the city of Grand Rapids

Accounting for ballad fatigue, voter turnout was still several times higher than in odd years.

Joel: Top of the ballad fatigue, due to dislike of the candidates running

Christine to Rina: Have voters expressed concern about the primary collection drowning out local elections in relation to voter fatigue?

Rina: No, they haven't. If anything, it should become non-partisan.

Joel: Expressing concern that elections may become more political. This is what they're seeing over in East Grand Rapids.

Rina: We should trust voters to be smart enough to see through it and give credit to the people.

Minorities suffer in odd-year elections due to lack of representation. Research and data support even-year participation.

Joe: Why not just eliminate the primary?

Rina: Many people do not know they can get a seat at a primary. All kinds of things have been tried to increase voter turnout; nothing will increase that but consolidating the election. Cost is not the leading reason for switching years, voter turnout is.

Bonnie: What if you have ten candidates? State law says you can have up to 4 elections per year. If we switch to even years isn't there a primary for your state candidate. You're going to go & vote in a primary anyway.

Nadine: A lot of people didn't even know why we have a primary because it's non-partisan. Whose job is it to educate the public?

John, Bonnie & Rina: People feel so disengaged, lack of response from commissioners when voters try to reach out has been a significant & increased complaint. People are tired of candidates running unopposed, voters feel that special interest people, organizations that have something to gain by getting the candidates in office.

Rick: how many votes do you need to take it to city commission

Rina: 7,000

Joe: If we came up with a similar proposal with the same outcome would you still move forward with your proposal

Rina: We would consider it.

John: Voters are unaware who their representatives oversee their ward, they asked these questions about local, state & even federal due to the ward increase.

Rick: We had the same feedback at the community meetings

Rina: We explain that were only a part of the proposals

Joe: How do you feel about appointments

Bonnie: I am not in support of appointments; I believe if someone wanted to serve the people they should work hard and get elected in that way.

Grand Rapids Democracy Initiative (Jack Hoffman)

Jack: In support of the eight ward proposal

How we got to where we were in Grand Rapids. Were now divided into 3 wards each ward has 36,000 voters and 2 representatives

How did we get where we're with this kind of hybrid system?

Divide it into eight wards representative has 17,000 voters/people they represent. Candidate would have to live within the ward.

Supports division of the city into eight wards, leaving the city commission to the mechanics of the division of the ward and the fair redistricting.

Increasing voter capacity, a not so good thing because a lot of voters are uneducated.

Smaller wards lead to a personal, direct connection, informed and an increased voter participation.

Trust the values of the system built

Curse of non-voter participation & education is because they feel it isn't even worth trying

Here's our take on the 6th ward proposal

Take the 3 wards divide them equally still leaves things as is, it just appears that is different.

The proposal of eight wards is to shake up everything, not just the appearance of doing so.

Christine: The city has grown in population and geographically eight wards makes more sense

Joel: Which of the two is better single membered wards or more representation

Danielle: Can you explain your take on single represented wards.

John: Voters not knowing where to go when they have a question or concern?

Danielle: even if we change the representation to single membered wards that won't change the efficiency of the representative

John: Single membered wards the voters will be aware who the problem is if their concerns and questions aren't answered, they can choose to vote out that representative

Nadine: Why eight wards, Rick asked that question, we were provided general information. Why eight?

Christine: Because six is too little, 10 is too many. We want to shuffle the deck; not throw it & have it land on the ground.

Danielle: asked for a more accurate number of constituents non-voting children etc as in the entire population in the district.

Joel: The wards are split up by those who voted, not by population

Rina to Jack & Christine: people are not going to like not knowing the exact logistics

Danielle: How do we make sure that there is diversity in representation? There are areas highly populated by Hispanic and African Americans and that by redrawing lines those area as just governed by people of colorimetric-membered wards have a diverse voter turnout.

Christine: we can't control that

Jack: I am not following can we discuss more about that later

Joe: Feels the eight-ward split would be negative regarding a diverse voter turn-out, research supports the smaller the turnout the likelihood of a smaller group elected an individual. Which makes elections easier to manipulate

Jack: Don't you have a concern of a small group of people already manipulating/controlling the turn-out.

Rina: Let's get back to the foundation of voting, connect directly to & with the people by switching to even years. Disbursing power back to voters, increasing the turn-out.

Back to Jack & Christine's presentation

Joe: We have the most racially diverse commission that we have ever have, isn't that a positive?

Jack: The current establishment has elected in a racially diverse commission, the appointed people by the elected commission are appointed because they will support the policies in place. We want to shake up that system, not bring it down but shake it up.

Nadine: So, are you wanting a diversity in gender, political parties/values & racial diversity?

Jack: Yes essentially

Nadine: Right now, the same officials initially elected in, never get voted out.

Christine: Like, Rina I have been collecting signatures. In general people are in favor of the eight in 1 ward proposals. I'm obviously pitching it in a certain lens, but I've had roughly 90% of a positive outlook.

3. Discussion of in-Ward engagement.

Christine: Weather city interest and state interest should dominate. At large nature of the current system is supported. Someone made the comment that two representatives are better than one. Four people showed up, two white men and two white women between 30 & 50. Feels there is lack of openness as far as the commissioners being able to focus on ward concerns versus overall city concerns. Proposes an issue focused survey, to provide room for narrative.

Joe & Danielle: We had large turnout, voters feel there is a "good old boys club", commissioners are non-responsive and not accessibility. The commissioners create this pipeline, of people to replace them. There was also concern expressed regarding lack of accessibility to commissioners. Could this be a lack of staff the issue?

Doug: Our Executive Assistants are complaining about the same thing, they support an executive (ex. Griselda supports Doug) in addition to two commissioners). Lack of staff the issue, believes extra staff would be helpful. A defined role, an administrative support individual so that those individuals aren't acting as that elected official.

Nadine: Feedback regarding the two commissioners living next to each other and supporting the division of wards. Increasing accessibility

Danielle: we have a set of problems that aren't solutions to the problem's voters submitted feedback for.

Joel: If were mailing out a ballad, we receive 90% of them back.

vacancy if the vacancy occurs 1 year before the next bipartisan election, references an incident with the library board.

Danielle: Diversity of issues within the wards, commissioners not having the bandwidth, the breadth or their own personal values didn't align with the diversity of issues.

Joe: Hasn't heard any argument against even year elections.

Joel: Removing university issues off the ballad to eliminate the little voter fatigue attributed to the even year elections. The county pays for ballads the city reimburses them for even year ballads. The city will have to start reimbursing the county for envelopes.

4. Set Next Meeting Dates

Every other week after October 25, 2019 meeting

11/8/19

11/22/19

12/6/19

5. Conclusion:

Neither the presenting groups nor the task force agreed upon combining or dropping their proposals to, support the other. However, they did agree it was possible. At the community meetings turnout varied, as did the demographics of the constituents. The conclusion to those meetings is that constituents are in favor of change, they have been very supportive of each proposal. Everyone agreed that change was needed, the how and execution of the how needs to be fine-tuned. Meeting dates were set and agreed upon.