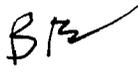


MEMORANDUM

TO: All Charter Commissioners
FROM: Barry Clegg 
RE: Moving Municipal Elections to Even Numbered Years
DATE: April 12, 2017

At our next meeting in May, I will ask that we begin studying whether or not to propose an amendment to the Charter to move municipal elections to even years.

Since 2001 (which is as far back as I have reliable data), voter turnout in odd year municipal elections has averaged 31.09%. Voter turnout in even year non-presidential elections (governor/senator) has averaged 59.05%. Voter turnout in presidential years has averaged 75.42%. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) can't be blamed for the abysmal municipal turnout, municipal numbers were terrible even before RCV was adopted.

One of the rationales for holding municipal elections in odd years is that voters were supposed to have more time and attention to focus on municipal issues in years without hectic federal and state elections. It seems to me that these turnout numbers demonstrate that this strategy has just not worked. A large majority of voters are not paying attention at all and are not voting.

Before we would propose such an amendment, we would need a legal analysis as to any issues or hurdles that would make it problematic to hold a "traditional" state or federal election at the same time as a municipal RCV election. There are RCV cities that hold elections in even years, but none yet in Minnesota.

We would also need to consider any technical hurdles. Could the municipal ballot be on the same physical ballot as federal and state election ballots? Could separate ballots be used? Would separate scanners be required? What additional costs would there be? And what savings would there be by virtue of not having separate elections in odd years?

I am not suggesting we would more than double municipal turnout by just moving elections one year ahead or back. There would certainly be down ballot drop off, people who vote for president or governor and then go home. But I do believe municipal participation would increase significantly and that more participation would mean a more diverse and representative electorate.

The actual change to the Charter would be fairly simple. I think we could make the change by deleting or changing just nine words. Implementation would also involve considering what happens in transition years (do elected officials get truncated or extended terms?).

There is no rush to act on this issue. There will be a municipal election this year and the next one will not be until 2021. We could certainly put this on next year's ballot if we choose to do so. In fact, given the much higher turnout numbers, I would rather have this considered in an even year.

I look forward to discussing these issues with you in May.

BFC

tlj

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