



**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL CONSIDERATION REQUEST**

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CITY CLERK
OCT 27 AM 11:00

TO: Mayor & City Council

FROM: Councilman Ron Nirenberg, District 8

COPIES TO: Sheryl Sculley, City Manager; Leticia Vacek, City Clerk; Martha G. Sepeda, Assistant to City Manager; John Peterek, Assistant to the City Manager; Christopher Callanen, Assistant to City Council

SUBJECT: Changing the City's nonpartisan municipal elections to nonpartisan general elections held in November.

DATE: October 24, 2016

Issue Proposed for Consideration

I ask for your support for the inclusion of the following item on the agenda of the earliest available meeting of the Governance Committee:

Recognizing that the state-imposed deadline for cities to change their election dates by resolution is December 31st, 2016, City Council should initiate action to: (1) consider an addition to the 2017 State Legislative Program to advocate for legislation extending the deadline; (2) re-establish and refer study of the issue to the Charter Review Commission at their next convening.

Brief Background

The May 9, 2015 municipal election – on a ballot that contained a mayoral race and six ballot propositions – drew approximately 12% of register voters. In the last several election cycles, San Antonio has seen voter turnout range from 18% in 2005 to as low as 7% in 2013.

On average, the Mayor and City Council elections draw 12% of the registered voters, compared to three to four times that amount during a November election. Low turnout numbers like those in May 2013 and May 2015 are not an anomaly, but indicative of a larger trend.

Civic disengagement is among the most pressing challenges facing our nation, and its impact in San Antonio is felt acutely in everything we do: from adopting the budget to addressing our city's future water needs, from addressing gentrification to protecting the health and safety of our citizens. Each of these efforts would be far more fruitful with greater public participation. Civic participation begins and ends with voting.

Not only would November elections allow for greater public participation, they would also allow for greater Council preparation for the budget process. Newly elected council members would have six months to become familiar with their new duties before considering budget development and adoption, rather than beginning this process immediately upon assuming office. The change would also provide for more election sites and reduces the City's participation cost.

Furthermore, municipal elections held in November can - and should - remain nonpartisan.

Whereas the Texas Election Code allows Council to change the election date by ordinance, the state has placed a deadline date of December 31, 2016:

“The governing body of a political subdivision, that holds its general election for officers on a date other than the November uniform election date may, not later than December 31, 2016, change the date on which it holds its general election for officers to the November uniform election date.”

In staying consistent with Mayor Taylor’s 2016 State of the City speech, Council should move forward with “a citizen-led and community-based process to prepare for a possible charter election in November of 2017.” While the Election Code allows us to move the election date, further changes such as the date of seating City Council members, campaign contribution limits, and term length and limits may require changes to the city charter. The Charter Review Commission should discuss and consider these changes for possible voter approval in 2017.

Moving municipal elections from May to November would be an important step toward greater voter participation. More importantly, unifying election dates cuts down on voter confusion and captures the full voice of our community.

Submitted for Council consideration
by:



Councilman Ron Nirenberg, District 8

Supporting Councilmembers’ Signatures (4 only)

District No.

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