

## Notice of Public Hearing

The Alexandria Election Process Review Committee will hold a public hearing on Saturday, June 2, at 10 a.m. at City Hall, located at 301 King St., in the Council Chambers, second floor. The Committee has met several times to review Alexandria's election process and related issues and has prepared a [document](#) on the issues under its consideration. For each issue, the document gives some background and describes current City practice and changes to the 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 public hearing or by e-mail or writing.

Written comments can be mailed or delivered to [Bernard Caton](#), City Hall, 301 King Street, Room 3400, Alexandria, VA 22314; or e-mailed to [bernard.caton@alexandriava.gov](mailto:bernard.caton@alexandriava.gov). Comments that are e-mailed, mailed, or hand-delivered, other than those submitted at the public hearing, are due by 5 p.m. on Friday, June 1.

Individuals who will speak at the public hearing are asked to limit their comments to no more than 4 minutes; those representing groups are asked to limit their comments to no more than 6 minutes. The chair will retain discretion to change these time limits if warranted. Those speaking at the public hearing are 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.

For more information on the Committee, call Bernard Caton, the City's Legislative Director, at 703-838-3828.



To send mail to City Council, other elected city officials and individual City departments, [click here](#).  
General City Mail: [CityMail@alexandriava.gov](mailto:CityMail@alexandriava.gov)  
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# 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 again to determine what its recommendations will be.*

*Please call Bernard Caton, the City's Legislative Director (703-838-3828), if you have any 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.*
- Arguments for extending term from 3 yrs to 4 yrs —*
- *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 ...

***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 Members of City Councils and Boards of Supervisors*

<b>Locality</b>	<b>Mayor/Board Chair</b>	<b>Council/Board Members</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.*