



FRANKLY SPEAKING

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Share your views on proposed switch to even-year elections



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Odd or Even?

We are not a democracy. In a democracy, each person who is part of the political entity votes on every issue.

Instead, we are a representative form of government where electors (citizens of Prior Lake) elect a mayor and four council members to represent them. Many years ago, those elected leaders chose to conduct elections in odd-numbered years.

On March 20, 2006, the City Council received a report from the city staff regarding even- or odd-year elections. Under state statute, cities may determine if they desire to conduct even- or odd-year elections if a specific process and timeline is followed.

Given the low 21 percent turnout at the 2005 election (2,591 voters out of more than 12,550 registered voters), Councilmember Steve Millar asked if even-year elections are more appropriate to assure that a larger number of voters decide who will represent them in city government for the next four years. There are certainly advantages and disadvantages of making a change from odd- to even-year elections. Here are a few:

Advantages:

- At least \$5,000 per election savings.
- At least three times the voter turnout.
- One-stop shopping for voters for all elected positions.
- Half need for election judge recruitment.
- Greater availability of polling places to the public.
- Odd-year reprieve from election signs and enforcement.

Disadvantages:

- Loss of exclusive local focus.
- Voters may be less informed on local issues.
- Change in school district elections from odd- to even-years.

To solicit input about this potential change, the Council will conduct a public hearing at 7 p.m. on Monday, April 17 in the council chambers at Fire Station No. 1. At that time, residents may share their views.

If the Council decides to move forward, it would pass an ordinance (local law) either May 1 or May 15, 2006, changing election days from odd to even years.

The ordinance becomes effective upon publication, unless a petition is received with signatures equal to 10 percent of the number of people who voted in the last local election within 180 days of the passage of the ordinance. In that event, the question would be placed upon a regular or special election ballot.

Moving to even-year elections is consistent with over 90 percent of the 853 cities in Minnesota. Nonetheless, the City Council wants to hear your thoughts so be sure to attend or watch the April 17, 2006, public hearing at 7 p.m. at the fire station or on Prior Lake Cable Channel 15, or submit your comments by e-mail or through the Your Voice forum on the City web site, cityofpriorlake.com.