



PUBLIC HEARING OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, April 29, 2009, on Voting Reform.

Mayor Davis started the hearing at 7:05 p.m. It was held in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Greenbelt Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Robert Manzi, City Solicitor; Steve Silvestri, Outside Counsel; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

Following introductions, Mayor Davis announced this was the second meeting in the third series of public hearings scheduled by Council concerning suggestions for changes to the City's current election process. She explained that this series of public hearings would focus primarily on whether or not to expand the City Council from five to seven members, which is the latest suggestion offered by several citizens at previous hearings and in email messages.

Mayor Davis stated the City Council had not taken any position on this matter, nor would it take a position tonight. She said the worksession this evening is one more opportunity for the Council to listen to all participants and to gather information.

Mayor Davis commented that Greenbelt has always welcomed discussion, with many differing viewpoints, and asked everyone to be respectful and open-minded throughout the evening. She asked all audience members who wished to speak to sign in and encouraged individuals who did not want to speak publicly to write or email their comments to Council.

Mayor Davis then opened the floor to speakers in the audience.

Bill Orleans, Greenbelt, asked if Council had made any decisions on changes to the current election process. Mayor Davis said Council had made no decisions at this time and were still in the process of holding public hearings. Mr. Orleans also asked if the City's cost to date on the voting reform issue was available. Mr. McLaughlin said he would have a cost update by the next public hearing.

David Lange, 12 Pinecrest Court, commented on the need to address the lack of diversity on Council. He said he supported increasing the number of members on Council, changing the election year and additional voter outreach. He suggested concerns regarding outside influence on local elections could be addressed through agreements between candidates.

Alan Turnbull, 45-H Ridge Road, said he is concerned that changing the election year will cause alliances between candidates and possible candidate endorsements from outside interest groups. He suggested strict campaign finance restrictions may be necessary.

Michael Hartman, 2-R Gardenway, asked if any changes would be in effect for the November 2009 elections. Mayor Davis said no decisions have been made at this time.

Barry Schlessinger, 410 Ridge Road #2, said he supports increasing the size of Council but is opposed to changing the election year.

Elizabeth Jay, 13-E Ridge, said she supports increasing the size of Council but is concerned with partisanship issues if the election year is changed. She complimented Council on the way the voting system issue has been handled.

Andy Carruthers, 2-M Gardenway, said he supports increasing the size of Council and early voting, but is opposed to changing the election year. He suggested the Board of Elections issue a formal opinion on the proposed changes. Ms. Murray said the Board of Elections will only comment on the “operational” aspects of running an election.

Sylvia Lewis, 2-C Gardenway, said she supported increasing the size of Council and additional advertising and promotion of Council elections. She said she was hopeful these actions would lead to diversity on Council. She did not recommend changing the election year.

Lore Rosenthal, 2-R Gardenway, recommended a voter education campaign to increase voter registration.

Mayor Davis thanked everyone who participated in the discussion. She said the third public hearing would be held on May 7, 2009, 7:00 p.m., at Windsor Green Community Center.

The meeting ended at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*