



Thursday, October 4, 2018
Minutes of the Special Meeting of the City Council

CALL TO ORDER

A Special Meeting of the Palm Springs City Council was called to order by Mayor Moon on Thursday, October 4, 2018, at 6:00 p.m., in the Council Chamber, City Hall, located at 3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Moon led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Councilmembers Christy Holstege, Geoff Kors, Lisa Middleton; Mayor Pro Tem J.R. Roberts; and Mayor Robert Moon.

Absent: None.

City Staff

Present: David H. Ready, City Manager; Edward Z. Kotkin, City Attorney; and Anthony J. Mejia, City Clerk, were present at Roll Call. Other staff members presented reports or responded to questions as indicated in the minutes.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Christine Hammond, voiced support for a five-district electoral system; stated that district elections will improve access for residents interested in running for City Council; opined that the Mayor's role is ceremonial and could be shared by the City Councilmembers.

Les Zendle, expressed support for a five-district electoral system; opined that an at-large mayoral position gives the appearance that the position has executive power or more authority than City Councilmembers; spoke on the importance of maintaining the principle that Councilmembers should represent the best interest of the City as a whole.

Peter Maietta, stated that he is considering running for a district seat in the future; addressed the importance of ensuring that City resources are allocated based on the greatest need and not just district boundaries; questioned how the sequence of elections will be determined.

David Freedman, expressed support for a five-district electoral system; pointed out that his proposed district boundary map keeps organized neighborhoods intact.

Mark Marshall, conveyed support for a five-district electoral system; opined that district elections will help reduce the cost of running for City Council; urged City Council to preserve organized neighborhoods and expressed a preference from the Smoke Tree Map.

Ed Dietrich, voiced support for a five-district electoral system.

Grace Garner, CVRA Community Working Group Member, voiced support for a five-district electoral system; opined that a rotating mayoral position will allow each district to have influence.

Dixie Miller, CVRA Community Working Group Member, voiced support for a five-district electoral system, pointing out that it will increase the likelihood of electing a neighborhood representative.

Alexis Ortega, CVRA Community Working Group Co-Chair, conveyed support for a five-district electoral system; opined that district elections will engage residents in the electoral process and decrease the cost of running for City Council.

Kathy Weremuik, CVRA Community Working Group Co-Chair, voiced support for a five-district electoral system; opined that district elections will increase the likelihood that people of color will run for City Council.

Stephen Moses, CVRA Community Working Group Member, stated that the community has expressed overwhelming support for a five-district electoral system; pointed out that a ballot measure related to the mayoral position would be time-consuming, expensive, and could result in a violation of the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA).

Ed Dube, CVRA Community Working Group Member, expressed support for a five-district electoral system; pointed out that five districts will result in strengthened minority voting power.

Tobias Wolff, Community Working Group Co-Chair, urged the City Council to vote unanimously to support a five-district electoral system; commended the City for addressing historical racial inequalities and building new lines of communication with minority populations.

Robert Findley, voiced opposition to eliminating the at-large mayoral position.

Naomi Soto, pointed out that electing executive leadership from the legislative body, such as a Prime Minister, often results in more women or people of color being elected to leadership roles.

1. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. PROVIDE DIRECTION REGARDING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA VOTING RIGHTS ACT (CVRA) COMMUNITY WORKING GROUP RELATED TO THE CITY'S GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE, ELECTION METHOD, AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS

The City Council commended the CVRA Community Working Group for their comprehensive report and their efforts to engage the community.

In response to City Council inquiry, Special Counsel Priest advised that incumbency should not be a factor in developing district boundaries, explaining the election process if incumbents are paired within a single district.

Mayor Pro Tem Roberts spoke on his experience serving on another City Council in which the mayoral position rotated amongst the City Council, noting that it gave each Councilmember an opportunity to have the ceremonial role and preside over City Council meetings.

During the course of discussion, individual Councilmember(s) offered commentary as follows. The below points do not necessarily reflect City Council consensus:

- A five-district electoral system is more consistent with the CVRA.
- The intent of the CVRA is to eliminate at-large elections when minority votes are diluted.
- The City would continue to have exposure to a CVRA challenge if it retains an at-large mayoral position.
- The City Charter calls for co-equal power amongst the five City Councilmembers.
- The current at-large system dilutes minority votes and that would remain if the mayoral position continues to be elected at-large.
- District elections will empower communities to choose a candidate of their choice.
- An at-large mayoral position would be exclusionary due to the high cost of campaigning citywide.
- In the City's history there have been no women, no Latinos, and only one African-American man to have served as Mayor.
- California has a bad history of voting on civil rights, noting that the Courts have had to intervene to restore citizen rights.
- The Palm Springs Mayor is not an executive position, pointing out that the City Council is the legislative body and the City Manager serves as the Chief Executive Officer, creating an appropriate check and balance.
- The City of Palm Springs is being portrayed as racist and divided.
- The voters of Palm Springs previously decided that the Mayoral position should be directly-elected.
- A City Council elected by-district and an at-large Mayor has been determined to be a legal option.
- The silent majority of residents don't want to eliminate the at-large mayoral position.
- There are no protections against a future allegation of a CVRA violation if a future Mayoral election results in racially-polarized voting.
- The City is still addressing the residual effects of racism exhibited during the razing of Section 14.
- The City Council will enact rules and customs to ensure that the best interest of the City as a whole remains the responsibility of all City Councilmembers.

In response to City Council inquiry, City Attorney Kotkin opined that the spirit of the City Charter calls for a co-equal City Council and that a five-district electoral system is more consistent with the City Charter.

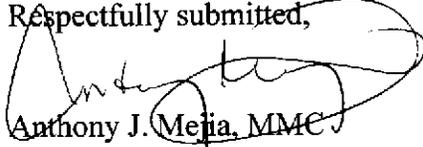
The City Council requested that the City's Demographer update the maps to include an overlay of the organized neighborhoods.

MOTION BY COUNCILMEMBER KORS, SECOND BY COUNCILMEMBER MIDDLETON, CARRIED 4-1 (MAYOR MOON VOTING NO), to adopt a five by-district, with a mayor selected from the City Council, electoral system.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:36 p.m., the City Council adjourned to a Regular Meeting of the City Council to be held on October 17, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall, located at 3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California.

Respectfully submitted,



Anthony J. Mejia, MMC
City Clerk