

INTELLIGENCE REPORT MARCH 9, 2012

March 2012 Pre - Election issue

Its election time again.

And as long-time observers, this may be the oddest cycle we've seen in years.

The Commission has placed a change to the City Charter on the ballot as Question 1. As noted in previous editions of the Intelligence Report, the City Commission dispensed with a citizen's Charter Review Committee and instead decided to amend the charter themselves over the holiday season. What they came up with shouldn't surprise you: two items that benefit themselves. Fortunately the final word is with the voters.

Question 1 on the ballot: The Charter change suggested by the commission seeks to lengthen the commission's time in office from 3 two-year terms to 3 three-year terms. This means increasing the maximum time if office by 50% from 6 years to 9 years - nearly a decade.

Despite vocal opposition at the public hearing to the proposal, including a rare appearance by two former mayors in opposition and a spirited attempt by DELPAC (a business political action committee) to derail the plan, the commission voted unanimously to proceed.

The commission's rationale for the lengthened terms was-as usual-interesting. They denied any self-serving motivation, but declined to exempt themselves from the benefit if it is passed. (Three of the current 5 members of the Commission would have their terms extended by one year under this proposal) Their reasons to proceed:

Six years is not enough to get things done.

Six years is not enough time to advance into key positions at the League of Cities, which may be able to help Delray on key issues at the county, state and national level.

The City saves money by having elections less often.

Let's examine these arguments: We believe that if an official enters office with goals, six years is surely sufficient time to accomplish them, as prior

commissions have shown. If an official has no goals, nine years will not magically lead to any more accomplishments.

As for the League of Cities argument, we checked with people who attend League meetings and found that our elected officials "rarely" attend meetings. Our Mayor has attended only a handful of meetings in the 5 years he has been in office. The other commissioners even less. Last month Delray Beach hosted a meeting of the League of Cities two blocks from City Hall. Commissioner Angie Gray left before the meeting ended and Commissioner Adam Frankel made a token 10 minute appearance. Our mayor and two other commissioners didn't attend at all.

The Commission has argued that the extra 3 years is needed for a representative from Delray to advance in the League of Cities. This is an odd argument. City Manager David Harden, representing Delray Beach, has been on the Board of Directors for 15 years. There is no higher office. Our City should have influence now. Also, all elected officials are encouraged to apply for leadership posts. They just have to fill out a request to serve, and are normally put in positions of influence quickly. Not one of our commissioners who claim to want to serve has bothered to fill out a simple request form. The League informs us that there is no record of anyone from Delray making a request to serve in the last 5 years.

As for the argument that fewer elections save the city money, we point out that the amount saved is estimated to be about \$15,000 per year. Given that the current Commission has voted to spend \$350,000 per year on a new tennis tournament, \$250,000 on a press box at a little league field and spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on consultants, we believe that \$15,000 is a small amount to pay for the right of voters to decide who sits on our Commission.

We see no convincing reason to change current rules. We recommend a no vote on Question 1.

We also recommend the seating of a citizen's charter review committee to take a comprehensive look at our charter. It was done in the 90s and again in 2001 and we're overdue.

As for the two candidate races:

Seat 4 features a four-way battle between Financial Review Board Chair Christina Morrison, clothing optional beach advocate David Armstrong, Pat Archer and Planning and Zoning Board Vice Chair Al Jacquet

Seat 2 is a race between Commissioner Angie Gray and community activist Dr. Vic Kirson.

This election marks what may be a turning point in Delray. A white candidate (Dr. Kirson) is running for Seat 2, which by tradition has been "set aside" for a minority representative, and a minority candidate (Al Jacquet) is running for a traditionally white seat. Both state that they wish to represent the entire city, not one segment of it. Is this the beginning of post-racial politics in Delray?

The Friends of Delray does not take a position on the Commission races, but urges you to get to the polls on Tuesday. Because few of our fellow residents bother to vote, you can have a large influence on the direction of our City.