



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWTON

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February 18, 2013

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Ald. Scott F. Lennon
President, Board of Aldermen
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Dear Ald. Lennon and Members of the Board of Aldermen:

The League of Women Voters wishes to express its concern over the proposal to forgo an interim election to fill the late Carlton Merrill's Board of Aldermen seat. In addition to this being contrary to the City Charter, the treatment of an election as too expensive and too inconvenient is not compatible with representational government.

With five elections already scheduled for this year, we certainly concur that adding a sixth seems less than ideal, and admit that it would require significant effort and expense. However, no one ever said that democracy would be easy and cheap. As a city, are we really prepared to say that it's acceptable for residents in Ward 1 to have less representation over the next 6 months than other residents around the city? LWVN wonders if the open seat were for a ward alderman, requiring a less expensive election, would the Election Commission change their recommendation? Should this decision really be based on convenience and cost?

The city charter is clear on this issue, something that is highlighted by the fact that the city would have to seek permission from the state to forgo this election. Our charter requires a special election if a seat becomes vacant up to 15 months into an alderman's term. This requirement, in fact, was a major improvement recommended by the 1971 charter commission and approved by the electorate. While this change was driven by a desire to prevent the then-common practice of Aldermen leaving office mid-term and choosing their own successors, nevertheless, the charter does not give the Board of Aldermen a choice of whether to hold an election or leave the seat open.

The League believes that, despite the inconvenience and expense, fully representing the electorate is an important feature of our government. We do believe that in the course of a review of the city charter, our community should discuss whether the 15-month requirement is the appropriate amount of time, and whether other courses of action should be made available if a seat becomes empty mid-term. But, until a charter discussion is approved by the voters, we should not cherry-pick which of our own rules we want to follow.

Sincerely,

Anne Borg and Sue Flicop
Co-Presidents, League of Women Voters of Newton