

Attachment "M"

Dear Councilmembers,

Neighborhood Councils came out of the most recent charter reform process. With the adoption of the charter, Neighborhood Councils were established and their role was defined but real-world function and dynamics were unknown. Now twenty five years have passed, and we have some idea of what the advantages and shortcomings of the system are.

During those twenty-five years, the Neighborhood Councils have been subject to ever-greater restrictions. Neighborhood Council members, though they are volunteers, must spend significant time participating in compulsory training. They can no longer meet in locations of their choosing. The age range for youth seats is now set by the City rather than the Neighborhood Councils.

At the same time, no new power has been conferred. Still, those speaking on behalf of Neighborhood Councils at City Council and Committees are not guaranteed speaking slots during public comment, and whether they can have additional time to present positions that are to represent thousands is up to the discretion of the Council President and Committee Chairs.

Consideration of additional restrictions on Neighborhood Councils is inappropriate at this time. A charter reform process has begun in this City, and consideration of the role, operation and composition of Neighborhood Councils should be a topic for this process, not for ad hoc legislative motions presented to Council.

Term limits are generally put in place because of incumbent advantages conferred by relationships with funders and because of other incumbency advantages such as districts gerrymandered to preserve such advantage. The Neighborhood Council system doesn't have these problems.

Term limits also serve to eliminate those with expertise and institutional knowledge and are widely thought to empower lobbyists and special interest groups. Getting rid of long-standing board members because of the length of their service certainly puts Councils at risk of being populated by those who do not understand the problems or who represent special interests.

Our Neighborhood Council has had very valuable youth representatives, both when we defined "youth representative" as somebody in their early twenties and also after it was redefined for us to be high-school age. Still, whether a Neighborhood Council has a youth seat and what the age range for eligibility should be for that youth seat should be determined by individual Neighborhood Councils and must not be defined by City Council.