



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Council term lengths

Date(s) of publication? March 18, March 25, April 8, April 29 (2018)

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) High Point City Council members are pushing idea for lengthening terms in office to four years instead of two. The Enterprise editorial board opposes this idea and our editorials and Opinion page have been referenced in discussions of this issue. An additional opportunity for hearing public comment resulted from an editorial questioning the timing of a required public hearing. The additional hearing and a decision on the issue currently are pending.

Two-year terms serve city well

It's clear what High Point City Council can do to allow members of future City Councils to serve four-year terms instead of the two-year terms they currently hold.

Council members can publicize the proposal to make changes, hold a public hearing, wait a few days and then vote to modify the city charter to give City Council members elected next year terms twice as long as our representatives currently serve.

It's also clear that this idea to extend terms for our elected city leaders finds its base of popularity mostly among those who currently fill the elected offices --- and hold the power.

And it's abundantly clear that most of the citizenry of High Point doesn't like this proposal. Perhaps that's why many of the citizens voicing opposition to this idea on the streets and in letters to editor call it a "power grab."

Back in February, barely two months after the current nine-member City Council — several of them new to the job — took office, the Council's Prosperity and Livability Committee sounded rumblings that longer terms were needed. Committee members and other Council members said they needed more time to learn what's required for the post and its responsibilities and to get oriented to the job.

We understand that the job has complexities. But the, "It takes awhile to learn the job," argument we hear from some

pushing for longer terms is bogus. ... If you don't know what you are getting into, don't run. Or if you want to run, take a year — or two — to study the job requirements and issues and then run.

Those pushing for four-year terms can't say the longer tenure would save the city money. With staggered four-year terms (and staggered terms is the only way any four-year term plan should be implemented), the city still must hold elections every two years.

At the very least, members of City Council wanting to change term lengths should be willing to put this matter to a vote of the people. However, we don't think they will be inclined to do so.

In 2000, after experiencing nearly a decade of four-year terms voted in by Council in 1991 without a referendum, High Point citizens voted 21,639 to 4,557 to return City Council to two-year terms.

Voters resoundingly rejected four-year terms in 2000. If City Council thinks the public's opinion has changed now to support longer terms, Council should give voters the opportunity to say so. However, we don't think people's opinions on this have changed since 2000 and neither has ours.

Two-year terms for City Council make elected representatives of this city more accountable to voters. Two-year terms have served the people of High Point well; four-year terms for City Council will not.

Is Council's public hearing date an April Fools' joke?

North Carolina law allows members of the current High Point City Council to lengthen terms in office for the next City Council, which will be elected in the fall of 2019.

But state law also requires the current City Council, which so badly wants to double Council terms from the current two years to four, to hold a public hearing to give citizens a chance to express their thoughts on the idea.

So dutifully complying with state law, this City Council has set that public hearing on the late afternoon/evening of Monday, April 2, the day after April Fools' Day.

Is this public hearing date some kind of April Fools' joke?

As the calendar falls for 2018, this date happens to be Easter Monday, the day after Easter, which is still considered by some in this state as a holiday (for eons in North Carolina, Easter Monday was observed as an official state holiday instead of Good Friday).

However this year, Monday, April 2 also is the first day of spring vacation for Guilford County Schools. That means lots of folks and families likely may be out of town on early vacations, taking advantage of this time while the students are out of class.

Additionally, Monday, April 2 is the day of the NCAA basketball national

championship game ... the culmination of March Madness, the college basketball tournament that has been the talk of the town for the past two weeks. Say what you will about the amount of emphasis placed on college sports, but this game — even if no local favorite is involved — draws people's attention.

Remember that last year on the day of the NCAA national championship game featuring the second straight appearance by the University of North Carolina Tar Heels, City Council unveiled plans for High Point to construct a \$30 million multipurpose stadium that's going up in the Church Avenue/Pine Street area of downtown. Plenty of High Pointers were focused on that championship game and paid little attention that day to what the city was planning to do.

And also recall that when City Council members voted last Monday (March 19) to set the public hearing for April 2, they gave High Point citizens only two weeks notice of this opportunity to voice their opinions.

There's still a chance, however, for City Council to make it clear that this April 2 public hearing is not an April Fools' joke. They can do that by moving the hearing and giving the public more time to prepare for this chance to voice their opinions — if that's what City Council really wants to hear.

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Thumbs Up

City Council extends public hearing

THUMBS UP to High Point City Council for extending into next month the time frame for citizens to express views on a proposal to lengthen City Council terms to four years instead of the current two.

Several members of City Council have spoken favorably of their proposal to extend terms in office for future Councils. Last Monday, Council held a required public hearing on the matter but also decided the public input period should be extended to City Council's meeting on May 7.

We commend Council for listening to several members of the public Monday and then deciding that the proper course to take was to allow more time for additional citizen comment. The Easter Monday hearing date, also the first day of spring break for Guilford County Schools and the evening of the NCAA national championship basketball game, potentially presented obstacles for some people who might have wanted to speak.

Five residents spoke during the hearing. One of them, former Councilman Latimer Alexander, spoke in favor of four-year terms, but the other four speakers did not support the change. Some speakers proposed that at least a referendum of the people should be held before Council acts.

Additional High Point citizens will have the chance to express their views on this important issue to City Council during its May

7 meeting. We encourage every High Point citizen to attend and let their opinion be known.

Guilford school board values High Point

THUMBS UP to the Guilford County Board of Education for holding one of its regular meetings in High Point and adopting a schedule to hold at least four more regular meetings here during the next 13 months.

The board will meet again in High Point City Council chambers in City Hall Aug. 23 and Nov. 15 of this year and Feb. 12 and May 14 of 2019.

High Point area residents of Guilford who are concerned about and supportive of their county schools showed up March 22 and packed the newly renovated Council chambers in City Hall. Recent media and technology upgrades to the facility will allow broadcasting of proceedings. School board meetings have been broadcast for several years, and the lack of a site in High Point to accommodate broadcast has hindered the holding of meetings here.

The throng of people who showed up for the school board meeting also deserves a **THUMBS UP**. The standing-room only crowd demonstrated this area's interest in school matters. High Pointers and area county residents make up a large percentage of Guilford County Schools students and parents. It gives us a good feeling to know that GCS officials and members of the Guilford County Board of Education value this city and the surrounding area enough to hold regular meetings here.

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A chance to speak up

Mark your calendars. ... Go ahead. ... Do it now.

Circle Monday, May 7, and make plans to attend the High Point City Council meeting that afternoon. It will be your chance to express your views on City Council's proposal to extend that body's terms to four years instead of the current two years.

The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. in Council chambers at City Hall on S. Hamilton Street. Aim to be there early and prepared to succinctly exercise your voice. Let the leaders of High Point know your thoughts about your city government.

This May 7 public hearing is an extension of the one begun April 2. As we've detailed previously, that date wasn't the best of times to hold a public hearing, and to City Council's credit, that hearing was extended to the upcoming meeting.

At issue is the proposal pushed by most members of City Council to extend terms to four years. Council currently serves two-year terms, and any change would not take effect until after the 2019 city elections. But this Council has the legal authority to change term lengths with a simple majority vote.

Council members say longer terms are necessary to allow newly elected members time to get acquainted with the job before they must begin thinking about a possible re-election bid just months into their terms. Opponents of the idea say two-year terms are fine because they make members of City Council more accountable to the people who elected them.

We side with the folks who like the idea of more accountability for our elected leaders. And we believe those citizens hold the majority view.

During the public hearing April 2, five people spoke. Four speakers opposed four-year terms. One expressed support; he was a former City Council member.

Some people have suggested the city should hold a referendum to gauge citizen opinion on this matter. But that's been done before. In 2000, after experiencing four-year terms for nearly a decade, citizens voted 21,639 to 4,557 to return to two-year terms for City Council. In an editorial two months ago after this proposal arose among City Council members, we doubted citizen sentiment had changed since that vote.

On May 7, at City Hall, you have a chance to voice your opinion. Don't miss the opportunity. Mark your calendar now.