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April 15, 2019

Honorable Members of the
Los Angeles City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
200 N. Spring Street
Room 395, City Hall

COMMITTEE TRANSMITTAL: REPORT BACK ON NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL (NC) SYSTEM REFORMS AND RECOMMENDATION REGARDING THE FEASIBILITY OF CONDUCTING ALL NC ELECTIONS ON ONE DAY

SUMMARY

The Neighborhood Council (NC) System Reforms Motion presented by Councilmember Ryu on May 25, 2018, and adopted at the Health Education and Neighborhood Council Committee meeting on December 12, 2018, instructed the Office of the City Clerk to report back on the feasibility of holding all NC elections on the same day, to provide for uniform citywide outreach and advertising to increase voter turnout, (C.F. 18-0467).

Under the current organizational and administrative structure governing NC elections, a single-day NC election process is not feasible. The current NC election process, while administered according to citywide rules and regulations set by the City Clerk and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), is largely guided by each NC's bylaws. In order to administer a single-day NC election process, significant modifications to this process are necessary. These modifications include the following for all NCs:

- Adopting a revised community interest stakeholder definition;
- Standardizing voter and candidate eligibility requirements;
- Instituting a uniform voting age;
- Requiring a self-affirmation voter verification method; and
- Adopting these revisions into bylaws.

It would also require an amendment in the Los Angeles Administrative Code (LAAC) to authorize the City Clerk to conduct all NC elections in one day.

To date, efforts to implement some of these modifications for the current election process have not been successful. Each NC represents the unique and diverse communities that make up the City of Los Angeles. By all accounts, they cherish the right to set their own bylaws and election requirements, which has made previous efforts to institute citywide standards difficult.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Clerk, or designee, respectfully requests that the City Council:

1. NOTE and FILE this report dated April 12, 2019, as it is provided for informational purposes only and no Council action is necessary.

BACKGROUND

Neighborhood Council (NC) elections are currently organized into 12 geographic regions comprised of eight to nine NC's per region. Regional elections are held every two weeks between late March and June of odd-numbered years. Each region has a specific regional timetable and Election Day. The regional election model allows for the distribution and otherwise heavy workload across a manageable timeframe and allows staff to use supplies and staff resources more efficiently. More importantly, the regional election model allows the City Clerk to rely on a small, but highly skilled and experienced staff, and NC volunteers to oversee the conduct of each NC election. The understanding of specialized election rules is key when conducting NC elections.

Please note that the single-day NC election scenario presented in this report does not contemplate the use of online voting or Vote-By-Mail.

Operational Requirements for a Single-Day NC Election

In order to conduct a single-day NC election, a number of adjustments to current regulations and processes will be necessary. In essence, conducting NC elections in a single day would mimic a citywide municipal election day where all election activities must take place for 100 NCs within the same time. Specifically, the following changes will be necessary to successfully conduct a single-day NC election:

Administrative Code Amendment

The LAAC authorizes the City Clerk and DONE to conduct Neighborhood Council Board Member Elections between March and June of odd-numbered years (Section 20.36(a)). In order to conduct NC elections on a single day, this Code section will need to be amended. Depending on how the amendment is drafted, individual NCs may have to amend their bylaws to reflect this change.

Election Procedure Modifications

Currently, NC elections operate under both a) general NC election rules and procedures, which address generic provisions such as polling place procedures, and b) NC-specific bylaws, which dictate governing board size, board seat names, voting ages, and candidate and voter eligibility rules unique to each NC.

In consideration of a single-day NC election scenario, the City Clerk would require/recommends standardizing some election rules, such as voter and candidate eligibility requirements, voting age, or the adoption of self-affirmation voter verification for all NCs. Standardization would minimize the overall complexity of the NC election process and present the greatest opportunity to reduce costs. More standardization would likely result in more efficient candidate filing procedures, poll worker training, and Election Day voter processing.

Please note that in order for standardization to happen, the individual NCs would have to consent to changing their bylaws and procedures to eliminate or add to their eligibility requirements.

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Election Timeline Revision

The current NC election cycle starts with a series of 30-day regional candidate filing periods, beginning in December and ending in April. Following the end of each candidate filing period for each NC, the City Clerk prepares ballots, recruits and trains poll workers, and assembles polling place supplies. These and other tasks take place within a 60-day period before election day. If all NC elections were to take place on a single day in June, a single 30-day candidate filing period, applicable to all NCs, would need to take place between December and January, possibly earlier.

NC Election Staff Expansion

Under the current regional NC election model, the City Clerk-Election Division utilizes all of its staff (23 permanent City employees) to conduct NC elections. In addition to its permanent staff, the City Clerk hires up to 15 as-needed staff to conduct NC elections.

If the City Clerk was required to conduct NC elections on a single day, the City Clerk would expect to hire and train additional as-needed employees to process candidate filing applications, recruit polling places, recruit and train poll workers, assemble supplies, and produce and tally ballots.

Poll Worker Recruitment and Training

Under the current election model, nearly 40 City Clerk staff serve as poll workers for eight to nine polling places on a given regional NC election day every other week. DONE and NC volunteers often provide additional assistance in elections with unusually high voter turnout, where as many as 15 additional staff members are required to manage operations.

In a single-day NC election model, the City Clerk would be required to hire nearly 1,000 poll workers to serve as inspectors, clerks, translators, troubleshooters, and poll worker reservists to serve at up to 100 polling places (one for each NC).

Single-Day NC Election Implementation

If the required modifications are made by 2021, the soonest the City Clerk could be prepared to conduct a single-day NC election would be in 2023. The City Clerk also recommends that these elections be held separate from City, State, Federal, and NC subdivision elections. The voting requirements and governing rules between NC, City, State, and Federal elections vary too greatly and could increase the risk of logistical and procedural challenges. Simultaneous subdivision elections would also cause mass confusion amongst NC voters.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Los Angeles City Council approved \$579,938 for the City Clerk to conduct the 2019 NC elections. Historically, approximately \$10 million is budgeted for a citywide municipal election. A single-day NC election may fall in between these figures. Once all of the required modifications are made, the City Clerk will be able to better determine the costs to run single-day NC elections.

Respectfully submitted,



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City Clerk

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EXE-009-19