

For Wards Alexandria!

Alexandria Times

## HOW TO MAKE CITY HALL MORE RESPONSIVE *FOR WARDS ALEXANDRIA!*

By Michael C. Maibach

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Did you know Alexandria's first City Council - elected in 1780 - was bicameral; that in 1804 we established our first Council Wards; that from 1780 to 2009 City elections *were never held in November* to avoid the huge distraction of federal elections? All of this is gone now, as is a City Hall responsive to her citizens. Their plans don't include yours anymore. We see this every day.

Many Alexandrians feel Mayor Wilson and the Council *no longer care about their views* and know they *cannot be held accountable* in our current election system. Why? Three City election laws now work together to eliminate choices and our two-party system: 1) At-large elections, 2) held in November, 3) every 3 years. These election laws together have created a form of *one-party control with no end in sight*.

We powerlessly watch as motorized scooters turn Historic Old Town into an amusement park - a place neither the Mayor nor Council live. We watch *stunning, hyper-development* on South Union Street show how a City destroys an historic neighborhood. Mayor Wilson seeks *densification at every opportunity* - to increase tax revenues. Ironically, densification *multiplies cars on the road* even as the Mayor demands "road diets" on King and Seminary. Twelve civic (12!) associations opposed removal of lanes. Wilson and the Council ignored them. A Seminary Road Facebook protest now has 1,400 members - you know, 1,400 taxpayers, homeowners, and voters. But the Mayor and Council know what is best for them. Salute and send in your taxes!

We love competition in sports and choices in airlines, phones, and cars. Yet we no longer have competition or choices in City elections. Our two-party system - once robust - is now dead. Republican Bill Cleveland served on the Council for 18 years, Vice Mayor in 1991 and 2000. In May 2009 Frank Fannon (R) and Alicia Hughes (I) defeated Councilmen Wilson and Lovain. Two days later Wilson and Lovain led the charge to legally move City elections to November. They knew the huge 2012 Presidential election turnout would defeat Fannon and Hughes. Wilson and Lovain were returned to office. We have had one-party rule ever since. City election laws must be returned to what we had before "massive resistance" eliminated Wards.

**COUNCIL WARDS:** At-Large elections mean we vote for six - six! - City Council members. What happened to "one person-one vote"?! From 1804 to 1950 (except 1921-31) Alexandria had Wards for the same reason Congress and the legislature have districts. At-Large elections create one-party rule *by their nature*. At-Large elections were adopted in 1950 as part of Virginia's "massive resistance" to school integration. This ensured minority neighborhoods were *not represented*. If you want your neighborhood represented, we must return to Council Wards. Alexandria had 6 Wards until 1950.

## For Wards Alexandria!

**2-YEAR TERMS / ODD-NUMBERED YEARS:** From 1804 - 1950 Alexandrians elected their Mayor and Council every two years. "Massive resistance" gave us 3-year terms. No other Virginia city uses 3-year terms because local elections are then constantly thrown into and out of federal and state election cycles. We must move to 2-year Council terms in odd numbered years to align with Virginia state legislative races, not Presidential and Congressional races.

On the eve of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 James Madison wrote, "The central problem we will face is one of representation." How does one design a government responsive to the will of the majority and yet respectful of minority rights, an electoral system that represents the varied interests among citizens as well as our unique regions (e.g. neighborhoods)? America's Founders were greatly influenced by Montesquieu's "Spirit of the Laws" (1748). He wrote that pure democracies become "tyrannies of the majority", that Republics must adopt "checks and balances" so that majority power never becomes tyrannical. Thus, our bicameral Congress, an independent Executive and Supreme Court, as well as Federalism among the states.

Alexandria's City Council no longer has the "checks and balances" of neighborhood Wards and locally focused elections. Returning to Council Wards and two-year elections in odd numbered years will return the accountability to City Hall that too many of our citizens feel has been lost.

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