



June 29, 2022

Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Chair, Rules Committee
San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Chair Peskin:

I am writing to voice my opposition to Item #4 (File No. 220638 [Charter Amendment – City Election in Even-Numbered Years]) on the June 29, 2022 Rules Committee agenda. While I applaud and share the goal of increasing civic participation in municipal elections and remain open and willing to collaborate on legislation to achieve that end, I believe moving this Charter Amendment forward to the electorate’s consideration with the minimal public input it is set to receive is a mistake.

Supervisor Preston, author of the Charter Amendment, upon introducing this proposal, compared the Charter Amendment to the work done in Los Angeles in 2014 and 2015. While on the surface, there is a similarity in that Los Angeles did present the voters of Los Angeles with a proposal to consolidate off year local elections with even year elections, Supervisor Preston failed to mention what Los Angeles did prior to presenting this proposal to the voters. In fact, the 2015 Los Angeles proposal was the product of an exhaustive year-long fact-finding commission convened by the City of Los Angeles to compile a report tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of their City at the time. This commission was created to address chronic and worsening low voter turnout in Los Angeles municipal elections which from 1989 to 2017 averaged at just 29.24%, with the preceding two elections of 2013 and 2009 resulting in a turnout of 23.35% and 17.9% respectively. While the City of San Francisco can and must strive to increase voter participation in its elections, the relative strength of San Francisco’s voter turnout over the same period (45.32%) as well as the considerable differences in the governance, composition, and administration of the two cities demand that similar attention is paid to the specific circumstances of San Francisco’s local elections by an equivalent independent fact-finding body.

The Los Angeles Municipal Elections Reform Commission was a nine-member body composed of academics, election experts, and neighborhood council leaders which presented its findings and recommendations to the City Council of Los Angeles after a year of research, public input, and consultation with relevant city officials. The resulting report outlined **thirty-three** specific policy proposals designed to address low voter turnout out of which only two involved a transition to even-year municipal elections.

While not mentioned by Supervisor Preston, the City of San Jose, even more recently, just this month, approved a similar change. Our neighbors to the south moved their mayoral election from the gubernatorial election to the presidential election. Again, unlike the proposal in front of the Rules Committee today, and far more akin to the diligent work done in Los Angeles, San Jose's proposal resulted from the work of a 23-member Charter Review Commission, which held multiple public meetings to discuss the proposal prior to presenting it the City Council, which also held public hearings before submitting the proposal to the electorate.

A thorough, independent, and objective accounting of possible solutions to improve voter turnout in San Francisco, modeled after the process established in Los Angeles and San Jose, is an excellent idea which I would be more than willing to engage with the Board of Supervisors to establish. The idea behind item #4 (File No. 220638 [Charter Amendment – City Election in Even-Numbered Years]) may be worth considering; however, without a comprehensive plan of action tailored to the specific causes and remedies of voter participation in San Francisco it falls short of what it could accomplish if given the time and effort allotted to the similar proposal successfully implemented in Los Angeles in 2015 and San Jose in 2022.

Sincerely,



London N. Breed
Mayor