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The Board approved this CIS by a vote of: Yea(15) Nay(0) Abstain(0) Ineligible(0) Recusal(0)
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Impact Information
Date: 03/16/2017
Update to a Previous Input: No
Directed To: City Council and Committees
Council File Number: 15-1022-S2
Agenda Date:
Item Number:
Summary: Please see our attached letter for more detail.

In short:
• Eliminate photo ID requirement. Not acceptable at the state level, not acceptable here.
• Minimum 15 year old voter age limit
• 3 ballot types should be a City Clerk target, not a mandate
• Increase DONE funding for citywide promotion
• Formal review of election rules and practices for NCs whose turnout is in lowest third
• Require filing of outreach plan prior to election and post-mortem after
• We do not support a 20% mandatory election spend. It will lead to waste and frivolous spending.
• Moving to odd-number years for NC elections is reasonable
• Do not extend terms beyond the necessary one year to get on the odd-year cycle

We generally support online voting, but:
• Registration is a broken mess. Must be fixed before the system is used again.
• ID upload was a major barrier to registration. Should not be required.
• Once the voting period began, there was still a long delay between registration and ability to vote. Users should be allowed to vote, even if ballot is provisional.
• Users must have immediate confirmation of registration (or see the errors they have to correct).
• Electioneering rules were not enforced at popup polls.
• The process for requesting a popup poll was flawed. A candidate could request a popup poll at locations that favored the candidate. Must have aggressive public notice and strong outreach to all candidates. Optionally, perhaps only an NC can request a popup, or a neutral NC committee be required to approve popups.

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Rules, Elections, Intergovernmental Relations, and Neighborhoods Committee
Hon. Herb Wesson, Chair
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

17 February 2017

Re: Neighborhood Council Elections

The South Robertson Neighborhoods Council believes in encouraging community participation and enfranchising as many voters as possible. At our February 2017 Governing Board meeting, the SORO NC Board voted to unanimously recommend the following reforms to the NC election system:

Voter Registration: we are in favor of lowering the barriers to registration to enfranchise more voters, including eliminating the photo ID requirement for online registrations. As a practical matter, it creates delays in confirmation and is inconsistent with Federal, State, County, and City requirements.

Voter Age: we are in favor of allowing youth to vote in NC elections, and have had success with our own 15 year-old minimum age requirement. We further strongly recommend that NCs follow our practice of appointing a student to a yearly term on the Board.

Ballots: we support the Clerk's office working with NCs to reduce the ballot types within a single NC election, while remaining flexible on a maximum where it is in the community interest to be so. Three ballot types should be a target, not a mandate.

Citywide Outreach: as many stakeholders remain unaware of the NC system at all (for many reasons), we support additional funding for DONE promote NC elections as opportunity to increase general participation and awareness.

Election Funding and Inclusivity: NCs should favor inclusivity and participation at every opportunity. We therefore recommend review of election rules and practices of NCs whose candidate registration and voter turnout places in the lowest third in the system each election. **Further, all NCs should be required to file an election outreach plan prior to the elections and a post-mortem after.** We *do not* believe setting a minimum expenditure of 20% of the NCs budget is the proper way to address the problem: it would invariably lead to waste and frivolous expenditures, eroding civic trust in the system and City.

Election Timing: we understand that the complexities of NC elections mean that it is impractical to hold them concurrently with other elections, and agree that moving them to odd-number-years is a reasonable solution. However, we strongly oppose any effort to extend terms beyond an additional year to implement the change. This has already happened once (in 2008), and in the interests maintaining the legitimacy of our elections, should never be repeated.

Online Voting: as a pilot participant in the 2016 online voting program, we support the future use of online voting, but only if the following problems are corrected:

a.   The registration software failed to operate correctly. The most egregious failure occurred when many registrants entered their addresses and were then incorrectly warned, in an alert window, that their address did not fall within the SORO borders. That alert message caused some voters to abandon the registration process, and leading to voter disappointment and

disenfranchisement. Our endorsement of future online voting is predicated on the software processes being fully tested and passing all tests, including end-to-end testing.

b. Many voters complained about the perceived need to upload an image of their state issued photo ID (usually driver's license). We understand that the photo ID requirement was not limited to state issued forms of such ID. We feel that this complaint was indicative of a poorly worded instructions on the website, and our endorsement of future online voting is predicated on the clear, complete, plain language and easy to follow instructions be implemented on the website, with instructions located on the relevant pages.

c. Regarding the photo ID requirement, we also question the logic of the photo ID requirement since the process does not support visual validation of the image of the voter at the time they vote.

d. Many voters complained about long delays between the time they completed the online registration and when they were able to vote. We recommend that registrants be allowed to vote right after they complete their registration application, with their vote remaining provisional until their registration is approved. We further recommend that a link be provided at the time of the provisional vote where they can check to see whether their vote has been accepted.

e. The online ballot software provided no confirmation that the completed ballot had been accepted. We recommend that voters be shown an alert window after they click the submit button for their ballot, showing that their ballot has been recorded, or listing any validation errors that have caused their ballot to not be recorded (and allowing them to correct such validation errors).

f. We support future use of popup polling process that was done several times in our Neighborhood, but would like to see several problems corrected in the use of those popup polling places.

Electioneering rules were not enforced at popups, and in some cases the physical locations, such as sidewalk locations, made it difficult for candidates to lead voters to the polling place without pushing or exceeding permissible limits. We recommend that this issue be reviewed with the City Attorney to determine clear rules for the people who run the popup polling, and for candidates, to permit optimal stakeholder inclusion without creating an environment where voters are uncomfortable or feel constrained as they register and complete their ballots.

In some cases popup polling places were requested by industrious candidates who were better informed than their competitors regarding how to arrange popup polls. We recommend that a clear and equitable process be adopted for popup polls, and all popup polls be subject to consistent requirements for public notice and outreach. While we did not come to consensus on that process, ideas include:

- all candidates be provided with the same information regarding how to request popup polling places, and any limits on timing or dates that the city is imposing

- requests be approved on a "first-come, first-served" basis

- alternately, popup polls should only be requested by an NC, not a candidate;

- the NC's election committee (or a panel of Boardmembers not up for election) review and approve all popup poll requests.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Doug Fitzsimmons
President, South Robertson Neighborhoods Council