



February 19, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

City of Dallas Charter Review Commissioners
1500 Marilla Street
Dallas, Texas 75201

Re: Chamber Support for Proposed Amendment No. 3

Dear Commissioners:

The North Dallas Chamber of Commerce supports approval of Proposed Amendment No. 3 to move municipal elections from May to November of odd-numbered years.

One of the goals of the Chamber is to promote community engagement and awareness, and we have taken a prominent role in encouraging voter turnout in important local elections such as City Council, ISD Trustee, and Community College Trustee races. Each year, we host multiple candidate forums and engage in extensive voting promotion in person, via social media, and at voting locations for these important races. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the Chamber, the League of Women Voters Dallas, and other like-minded civic groups, voter turnout in these May elections has been exceptionally low.

Historical data in Dallas County (where most of the City of Dallas residents vote) reflects that voters are more likely to participate in a November election instead of a May one. In 2023, in the most recent November Constitutional Amendment election, a total of 169,386 voters participated out of an eligible number of 1,412,235, for a turnout of 11.99%. In the May 2023 Joint and Special Election, Dallas County participating voters numbered 114,474 out of an eligible 1,291,448, reflecting a turnout of 8.86%. The disparity is even more extreme in 2022, when in November, 632,674 residents voted out of an eligible 1,422,849, for a turnout of 44.47%. On the contrary, in May, 91,957 out of 1,395,231 registered voters (6.6%) participated in the municipal elections. These trends consistently repeat themselves when comparing May and November elections in earlier years as well.

Quite simply, turnout in November elections far exceeds May ones. Even in 2023, when the May local elections featured many contested Mayoral, City Council, and ISD elections, while the November elections only included proposed Constitutional Amendments, the voter turnout was still higher in November, despite there being no candidate elections at all. Voters are more accustomed to voting in November, and we believe turnout for municipal races will increase if the City Charter is amended to adjust the voting schedule.

The current voting model is challenging for many voters, with partisan primaries stacked on top of municipal elections, and run-off elections layered in. Multiple elections scattered throughout the year at oddly placed times can cause voter fatigue, reducing voter participation – which makes the



process less inclusive. The simplest way to increase voter turnout is to consolidate the overall number of elections.

Consider, for example, a 2024 Democratic Primary voter in North Dallas and residing in Dallas Independent School District 1, whose election takes place in May and already has three announced candidates before the filing deadline. Because there are multiple Democratic Primary elections (including Texas Congressional District 32 and Texas Senate) which feature more than two candidates and could easily go into a run-off election, this voter will likely be asked to vote four times in four months – in a lengthy March partisan primary election; in an early May municipal election that also features the City’s bond propositions; in a late May partisan primary run-off election; and in a June run-off election for the DISD race. Even with Dallas County making it easy to vote at any voting center, this is still asking a lot from a voter. Consolidation of municipal elections to a November timeframe would mitigate much of this fatigue.

In addition to increasing voter turnout through election consolidation, there is an economic benefit to the switch as well. The applicable governing authorities pay Dallas County to administer their elections. If the municipal election is moved to November, it will be significantly less expensive for the County to administrate. As estimated by the Dallas City Secretary, a May election costs the City of Dallas \$990,421.34 to administrate, whereas a November election costs \$558,592.48. With so many municipal needs identified through the recently completed bond allocations, having an extra \$431,828.86 every year could go a long way toward supporting other City needs like parks, arts, libraries, public safety, or economic development. Even if voting data reflected equal turnout between May and November, there is an economic advantage for the City to hold these elections in November.

While the Chamber supports moving municipal elections from May to November, it is important to note that Amendment No. 3 is only feasible if these elections take place in odd-numbered years so that municipal elections are not on the same ballot as partisan ones. In particular, the Chamber would not support moving the election date to November if the Charter Review Commission opts to recommend a three-year term cycle, which would result in staggered terms such that some elections would overlap with partisan ones.

We encourage the Commission to approve Proposed Amendment No. 3.

Should you have any questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Stephen Angelette in black ink.

Stephen Angelette
Chairman of the Board

Handwritten signature of Ken Malcolmson in black ink.

Ken Malcolmson
President/CEO

Handwritten signature of Jeff Kitner in black ink.

Jeff Kitner
Chief Operating Officer