

Michael P. May
6405 Landfall Drive
Madison, WI 53705-4310

DATE: November 25, 2020

TO; Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway
Members of the Common Council

FROM: Michael P. May

RE: Referendum on Reform of the Common Council; Legistar # 62930

I write to urge you to **adopt the binding referendum** resolution and not the companion advisory referendum. I will be very frank with you in this letter, writing as a resident, not as your legal advisor.

First, John Rothschild – former vice chair of Task Force on Government Structure and former assistant city attorney – shared with me his cogent letter to you explaining the failures of the proposed advisory referendum. I concur fully with his analysis. In order to save your time, I will not repeat his points here, but ask that you carefully consider them. You also should have received an email from me on this issue, and I published an opinion piece in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. I ask that you also consider that material.

Second, I add a few additional observations of my own.

The advisory referendum proposal – advanced primarily by those who oppose council reform – is a thinly veiled attempt to kill any chance at reforming the size and structure of the common council. If the members of the council want to deny Madison’s residents the opportunity to decide whether to discard the creaky machinery of the current system, you ought to have the guts to say so out loud. Rather than hiding behind a completely ineffective advisory referendum, simply vote down any reform proposal. Tell your constituents that you know better than they do about how to govern them. Tell your constituents that the last thing you want is for them to have the power to decide how they wish to be governed.

Setting aside that the proposed wording of the advisory resolution is so incredibly confusing that you will learn nothing from it, nobody who cares about the issue of council structure – whether in favor of council reform or in favor of the current structure - will spend any time on a meaningless advisory vote. If you want to know what people think, propose the change in a charter referendum and let us have a meaningful vote.

The Task Force on Government Structure spent countless hours and numerous hearings to make a recommendation to the council. You will send a strong message to its members, and to future citizen study bodies, that your mind was made up ahead of time, and you will ignore the results of their work. Can you imagine the council having ignored the recommendations for reform of the Madison Police Department? Can you imagine the council having ignored the recommendations to remodel the Madison Municipal Building? Why would you ignore recommendations to reform or remodel yourself?

In trying to fathom why council members would want to deny our opportunity to decide how we shall be governed, I kept wondering: **what are you afraid of?**

-Are you afraid the people of Madison may decide the council structure today does not work for them? TFOGS found that it does not work for us.

-Are you afraid the people may disrupt the easy access to the halls of power by the white and wealthy in our city? TFOGS found that this is currently the case.

-Are you afraid of pulling back the curtain on the inequality of the current structure, with some districts benefitting and other districts – usually the ones with communities of color and with less treasure and time -- losing? TFOGS found this to be the case; the current representation of people of color on the council is an historical anomaly.

-Are you afraid of losing your position?

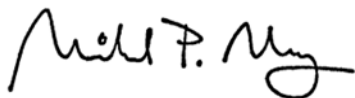
-Are you afraid of letting the people determine the government they want?

The advisory referendum is a bad idea. Adopt Alder Harrington-McKinney's resolution calling for a binding charter referendum.

Let the people decide!

Thanking you for your service, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael P. May". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael P. May

