

TFOGS - C.C. Schmitt

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DAVE AHRENS

Alder Part-time and Full-time:

As has been noted in our discussion, the pt/ft issue is inextricably linked to the other questions of salary, term limits and the size of the Council. In a sense, they are a package.

As a practical matter, while some Council members are willing and able to work near or at full-time for a part-time salary (\$12K/YR), most are not. Thus, a change to full-time work must include a substantial salary increase and with that, a decrease in the size of the Council.

Number of Alder Districts:

I have no principled objection to a smaller body; say for argument purposes, a six-member Council. I assume the salaries would be no less than \$75,000 and have a full benefit package of 30% (total compensation a minimum of \$100K). They would also probably have additional staff; although I'm doubtful of the value of their position. As full-time staff, they would require additional office space and other accoutrements fitting the office. Together, that would add at least another \$40,000 per member.

Each member of a 6-member, Council would represent 45,000 constituents. Politically, this places them in a different position than the status quo wherein a Council member represents roughly 12,000 members.

They will represent almost as many people as a State Representative (about 55,000). Also, they generally have more frequent and regular contact with constituents than a State Representative. Thus, this would put this in a position of being better positioned to run for a state office than is currently the case.

Although Council members have not been reluctant to run for Mayor, except in a few instances (Soglin '73, Bauman '95), they have not been successful. Part of the reason for this relatively poor record is the relatively small "base" of the Council member. In a smaller Council, the base will be larger. As such, members of the smaller Council, would be an immediate potential opponent of an incumbent Mayor.

Effects on Representation of a smaller council: My hunch is that a smaller, full-time Council with a larger staff will not mean better representation than the status quo. As a practical matter, members could not attend as many neighborhood association, district meetings, city events, etc. that are regularly attended by those with smaller districts. As districts expand, individual constituent issues might not be as important and been seen as trivial "from the larger perspective."

In Mayor Dave's comments to the TFOG, that it is questionable whether the full-time City Council of Milwaukee with aides, offices, etc. are "better" representatives than their larger, part-time Madison counterparts. I think the "question" is rhetorical. The answer is they are not.

Alder Terms:

Alder terms of two years is satisfactory means of keeping Alders in touch with constituents. Few Alders have competitive races once they are incumbents. If they do have a competitive election, it is typically before their second term.

Short terms (which I consider to be two years) keeps Alders in touch with constituents which gives them an opportunity to learn about the community they represent. It is remarkable to me how quickly communities change- both physically and demographically. The only way to really understand the changes is to walk through it and talk to the residents.

Term Limits:

Opposed. For the Council, as it is for the state legislature, term limits are a “solution in search of a problem.” (Note to Atty Strange: If we don’t already have one, it would help to get a bar graph of Council members/ # of terms for 2018-19 and 2019-20). Term limits are a mechanism for lobbying interests to control the legislature.

Staggered Terms

It isn’t clear to me what problem this would address. The large number of Council members generally assures that there are enough members with seniority and experience to assure some level of continuity, information-sharing and mentoring.

At-Large and Geographic Districts

I think the Council as a whole and as individual members, is cognizant of the balance and tension between local and city interests. Some members focus more on city-wide issues and others are primarily concerned with their neighborhood issues. One member described himself as “the representative of health institutions” and another as the representative of immigrants. As such, I don’t think there is a need for at-large position on the Council.

There are some practical and operational considerations as well:

- The candidates for the position would be required to run a city-wide campaign. If someone was going to run city-wide and raise \$250,000, they would just as well run for Mayor, County Exec, etc.
- The member(s) who are city-wide would immediately be positioned as a potential candidate for Mayor and for that reason, differentiated from other Council members.
- There are very substantial differences in voter turn-out between Aldermanic districts. For example, in November 2014, voter turnout in District 14 (Southside represented by Ald. Carter) was 48% and in District 6 (Near Eastside represented by Ald. Rummel), 86%. The two highest performing districts cast substantially more votes than the three lowest performing districts. (All three of the lowest performing districts are represented by African-American Alders.)

Based on voting history, it is clear that a few districts would have a disproportionate impact on the election of a city-wide Council member in the same way as they do for other city positions.

Compensation:

This is a very contentious and complicated issue.

Some of the arguments for a “substantial” increase in salary are:

- Low salaries restrict lower-income residents from office-holding.
- Low salaries reduce participation of single-income households.
- Salaries are not commensurate with the time, knowledge and responsibility of the office.

Some of the arguments for maintaining roughly the same salary are:

- The Council member position is traditionally lower paying as are most elected representative positions.
- For most Council members, the position does not warrant a full-time salary.
- Lower-income individuals do not serve in “legislatures” with higher salaries.
- Higher salaries would create pressure for the inadvertent but significant result of shrinking the size, creating full-time positions.
- Substantial increases in salary and transition to FT would mean a substantial increase in costs.

Staffing Support

I have not had any indication that there is insufficient staff support.