

Markech S'up Date: 11/2/06

THE CITY COUNCIL REFERENDUM

Hello all!

What follows is a compilation of my research and opinions on the city council referendum. It is not meant to be a "grab-n-go" piece, but rather a lengthy and informative treatment. My hope is you will take the time to carefully consider the question being put to you. Let's get to it...there's a lot to cover.



On November 7th, 2006 you will be asked to cast a "yes" or "no" vote on the following binding referendum question:

"Shall the City of PARK RIDGE
restrict the number of alderman to seven,
with one alderman representing each ward?"

I strongly urge you to vote "no".



"Whenever the people are well-informed,
they can be trusted with their own government"

~~ Thomas Jefferson

In 1910, the voters approved changing Park Ridge from a village to a city, with a mayor and two aldermen from each of three wards. At that time Park Ridge's population was 2,009 residents.

The State of Illinois Municipal Code provides that cities the size of Park Ridge - with a population from 20,000 to 50,000 - shall have 14 aldermen, although it permits a change in the number of aldermen through referendum. By contrast, villages, irrespective of population, may have a president and 6 "at large" trustees, although that number can also be changed through referendum. Arlington Heights added two trustees to their city council.

Consequently, the number of elected representatives governing municipalities in the Chicago area varies depending on the nature of the municipality and the voters' preference:

22 towns in the Chicago area that elect aldermen from wards

11 towns elect one alderman per ward:

Berwyn
Burbank
Calumet City
Chicago Hts.
Des Plaines
Evanston
Harvey
Markham
Oak Forest
Prospect Hts.
Rolling Meadows

11 towns elect two aldermen per ward:

Blue Island
Country Club Hills
Countryside
Elmhurst
Hickory Hills
Hometown
Lake Forest
Northlake
Palos Heights
Palos Hills
Park Ridge

That's a 50/50 split, for those of you keeping score.

As you can see, it's clear that having two aldermen per ward is not at all "out of fashion." And despite proponents of the referendum claiming that Park Ridge has one of the largest councils in the State of Illinois, no less than 10 municipalities in Illinois have 14-member councils; and another 11 municipalities elect 10-member councils. So the number of Park Ridge aldermen is hardly an "oddy".

But regardless of what other communities adopt as their forms of government, the question still remains: **Do we in Park Ridge want to cut in half the number of representatives watching out for our interests? Do we really believe that less over-sight of our city services and tax dollars will better serve us?**

It's been said that, "conservatives believe that the ideas, establishments and customs of those who came before them should not be precipitously abandoned for newer models simply because they are fashionable." Our form of government has served us well and protected residents' interests for nearly 100 years. We should not abandon, for the sake of "fashion", a system of representation that has helped to maintain the unique and elevated status Park Ridge enjoys as a wonderful place to live and work.



"To be ignorant of one's ignorance is the malady of the ignorant"

~~ Amos Bronson Alcott

In a recent [Letters to our Editor](#) in the Journal & Topics newspaper, resident Don Bach, who circulated petitions for the council referendum, wrote, **"It has become clear that in a town of 38,000 people, there are simply more council seats than quality individuals...to fill them."** That is an insult to our community...and to all of the people who have served on the city council.

In the course of my research into the referendum issue I started looking at demographic data from several sources, and found that Park Ridge has a more highly educated and successful population than most other surrounding communities. In all, I reviewed 55 municipalities and found that not only do we in Park Ridge have a higher level of median home value, and median household income, than most other surrounding communities, but that those towns which have chosen greater numbers of representatives have, on average, more educated populations:

Towns with 2 Aldermen per Ward

% of population

Avg. H.S. or higher	= 83%
Avg. Bachelors or higher	= 25%
Avg. Grad/Professional Dgr.	= 9%

Towns with 1 Alderman per Ward

% of population

Avg. H.S. or higher	= 79%
Avg. Bachelors or higher	= 22%
Avg. Grad/Professional Dgr.	= 8%

(w/out Evanston: 77%, 19%, 6% respectively;
Evanston being home to Northwestern U.)

I believe that cutting our representation in half would reduce our ability to tap the greatest resource and asset we have – our residents. The diverse talent, interests, and expertise, of those who choose to serve on the city council, ensures that a broad base of experience and views are brought to each decision our council makes.



"Our political institutions work remarkably well.
They are designed to clang against each other.
The noise is democracy at work"

~~ Michael Novak

Cutting the council in half would completely change the council's committee structure, where the four standing committees - Finance & Budget, Public Safety, Public Works, and Procedures & Regulations - perform all the nitty-gritty, detail-work of the city council. Policy matters are debated, details questioned, and refinements made before a matter goes before the entire city council for a vote. These committees are where