

## **METHODS OF ELECTING CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

For LWV of Boulder • 1981

### A. Election At Large

#### Arguments For:

Individual voter chooses all council members  
Each council member is responsible to all voters, which encourages interest in the entire city  
Voters can choose from the best candidates regardless of where candidates live<sup>1</sup>  
Can strengthen a feeling of unity in the city and minimize local conflict  
Election is less costly and easier to administer - ballots all the same  
Voters can select a majority of council in one election

#### Arguments Against:

Possible to elect candidate who does not win in his/her own district  
Tends to elect well-known, Well-financed candidates, not necessarily the best people  
Campaigns are more costly  
Distortion in election results due to size of field/possible to elect by plurality

### B. Election By Ward<sup>2</sup>

#### Arguments For:

Guarantees representation of each area of city  
Council member knows needs of his/her area  
Chance for minority representation  
Voter can be better informed since he/she votes for one or few candidates  
Candidates can conduct more personalized campaign since less territory to cover  
Campaign costs are less<sup>3</sup>  
Same method used to elect state legislators and members of Congress

#### Arguments Against:

Council members may be more concerned about needs of their wards than needs of entire city  
Invites "log-rolling" or vote swapping  
Can lead to minority view getting more than its share of representation  
Tends to accentuate differences rather than minimize them  
Difficult to maintain "1 man, 1 vote"  
Problem of who draws districts and when  
Voter is deprived of right of voting for all members of council even though all members legislate for for him/her<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In Boulder, charter review committee found that no geographical area lacked representation (since 1971 *coup*, black, long-hair, w. #5. Location of one's residence is not one's only interest

<sup>2</sup> Multiple member districts have the same positives and negatives but also have the problem of how to stagger the terms of council members.

<sup>3</sup> Maybe not in Boulder, which has one newspaper, one local radio station.

<sup>4</sup> Other arguments: One's representative may be of different political philosophy. Voter cannot vote for all, though all govern us. Voters might be less interested. Smaller district are more likely to elect extremist. Voters might elect someone who didn't win in their own district.

C. Candidacy By District, Election At-Large

Arguments For:

Individual voter chooses all council members  
Guarantees representation of each area of city  
Council member knows needs of his/her area  
Each council member is responsible to all voters, Which encourages interest in the entire city  
Chance for minority representation  
Same method used to elect county commissioners and school board members

Arguments Against:

Possible to elect candidate who does not win in his/her own district  
Tends to elect well-known, Well-financed candidates, not necessarily the best people  
Campaigns are more costly  
Distortion in election results due to size of field/possible to elect by plurality

D. Combination Methods

Some Elected by District, Some At-Large

Arguments For:

Offers compromise and the advantages of both systems  
Ensures some degree of geographic representation  
Possible to balance ward interests with interests of entire city - can give council members appropriate assignments  
Lower campaign costs for some candidates  
Better for minorities<sup>5</sup>

Arguments Against:

Possible to elect candidate who does not win in his/her own district  
Tends to elect well-known, Well-financed candidates, not necessarily the best people  
Campaigns are more costly  
Distortion in election results due to size of field/possible to elect by plurality  
Higher cost of election (ballots different)

E. Some Run From Districts, Some Run At-Large; All Elected At-Large

Arguments For:

Same as above except higher campaign costs

Arguments Against:

Same as above except higher campaign costs

---

<sup>5</sup> In Boulder, differences are about affluence more than race.