



Lewiston City Council
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA
Community Engagement Event - Elections
Tuesday, April 5, 2022 – 5:30 p.m.
Lewiston City Library – Second Floor Event Space – 411 D Street
Lewiston, ID 83501

Seating will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. All others who wish to observe this meeting may watch and listen to the livestream on their own device(s) by visiting the City of Lewiston's Facebook page or the City's website at cityoflewiston.org.

I. KICK-OFF (Mayor Johnson):

Mayor Johnson welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting, wherein the topic is City elections and the manner in which candidates can run for City Council. Currently the City is under an at-large system, where candidates run for any open position and voters can then vote for any candidates they would like. Because the Council is in the process of rewriting Chapter 2, which handles ordinances, administration, powers of the mayor, powers of the Council, elections, etc., they felt it was important to hear from the public on possibly changing the way elections are conducted. Under the Districts system, a candidate might have more of an opportunity to serve on the Council. Under the at-large system, every voter has the opportunity to vote for one or more candidates and he/she could be more likely to get voted for one of those positions which may make them feel more represented. With a Districts election, citizens may have a specific councilor to turn to with their concerns and potential action and can then hold them accountable for council actions. Campaign costs may be more expensive under the at-large format as the candidates are trying to appeal to the entire community rather than a small neighborhood or specific district. Those increased campaign costs may detour some individuals from running. At-large candidates may take moderate stances to appeal to a broad range of voters. If they were elected under a particular District, they may be more in tune to specific concerns. Councilors under an at-large system may have a city-wide focus rather than a district focus. Finally, Mayor Johnson cited some research wherein it states that councilors under an at-large system may be more likely to raise taxes.

II. PRESENTATION - DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ELECTIONS AT-LARGE, BY SEATS, AND BY DISTRICTS: City Attorney Jana Gómez

City Attorney Gómez welcomed those in attendance, stating it is nice to see interest from the community as to how their city is run. She noted there are three different ways in which Councilors may be elected: at-large, by council seats; or by districts.

Three councilors are elected every odd number of years. Currently, there is a separately elected Mayor and six councilors. Three councilors will be up for election in November 2023, and the other three in 2025.

At this time, the city council is elected through an at-large system. This means that the three candidates with the most votes wins the election.

With regard to Council seats, an individual may run for one of the open seats. The candidate with the most votes for each seat wins.

If it was decided to change to candidates running by Districts, the City would need to be divided into six districts as there are six councilors. Those districts would have to contain, as near as possible, the same amount of people. Individuals living within a specific district could then run for Council representing the district within which they live. Candidates with the most votes for each district would win.

Mayor Johnson reiterated that under both the at-large and council seat systems, voters can vote for any candidate. However, under the District format, an individual would have to live within and vote only for the candidates running in that district.

Councilor Liedkie reported that she has been reading about all three election options and has determined that a change from at-large to council seats would not greatly affect election costs. However, with districts, the division of the city into six areas would most likely require a fee to an expert in that field. City Attorney Gómez replied that she has not yet had the discussion regarding costs with County Clerk Weeks, but assumes there will be additional costs related to this form of elections.

Councilor Forsmann questioned what would happen if there were no candidates running in a particular district. Ms. Gómez explained that those interested could submit an application and the Council would then make the selection.

Mayor Johnson shared comments provided by Nez Perce County Clerk Patty Weeks, wherein she stated that if there was a change from at-large to districts, the election process would be more challenging and costly, especially if the districts don't follow the current precinct lines.

Mayor Johnson reported that a bill was passed during the 2020 legislative session that states that municipalities over 100,000 had to move to District elections. At that time, the only city impacted by this legislation was Boise. He noted, however, that other cities have chosen to utilize the Districts system since then. An additional bill was passed at the same time which states that if an individual is running unopposed for a certain seat, there would not need to be an election. This was created for the purpose of cost savings to municipalities.

III. CITIZEN COMMENTS/DIALOGUE WITH THE CITY COUNCIL REGARDING CITY COUNCIL ELECTION OPTIONS

Dick Shed, Lewiston, said that when dividing the City, both utility districts should be taken into consideration. He said that his suggestion would be to simply divide it between Lewiston Orchards Irrigation users, and City of Lewiston users. Ms. Gómez responded that State law sets out how the districts can be established, and must contain about 500 people each.

Richard Eldredge, Lewiston, said that Lewiston should be independent from the way larger cities are governed. He believes Mr. Shed had a fair and honest proposal and whatever choice is made, it should be one that is best for this city.

Kathleen Gaines, Lewiston, stated she opposes the district option after watching the way districts have been divided for the past several years within other states. She said she believes that this is not a fair system and Lewiston is not big enough and is not divided economically to warrant such a change.

Ada Eldredge, Lewiston, asked if under the council seats process, could an individual run for more than one seat. City Attorney Gómez replied that a person can only run for one seat.

Brian Hensley, Lewiston, said he doesn't understand the need for six districts when in Lewiston, there are really only two: downtown and the Orchards. In looking at what really divides the city, it is the water and sewer systems. He agreed with the earlier proposal mentioned by Mr. Shed.

Kevin Kelly, Lewiston, spoke to keeping the currently at-large system in order to enjoy a non-partisan election. With seats or districts, there is a risk of bringing partisanship into local elections.

Nick Woods, Lewiston, stated that he supports council seats as he believes it provides the most voice to the people and accountability.

Sue Brown, Lewiston, said she believes the idea of districts is more complicated than what is needed for this small community. She also expressed concern for council seats as there may be three individuals running for a particular seat who are all great candidates for the Council. However, under this form, only one of those individuals would win. With council seats, some very good prospects who are willing to serve may be eliminated. Ms. Brown said the current at large method ensures every voter in the city has a voice.

Dodd Snoddgrass, Lewiston, agreed with maintaining at large elections for the future of this community. With districts, people get divided into siloes, and given

Lewiston's size, it doesn't make sense. He too expressed concern for losing good candidates under the council seats form.

Councilor Kleeburg entered the meeting at 6:08 p.m.

Councilor Blount said he finds it interesting that the chance of raising taxes under the at-large system is higher. Mayor Johnson replied that he would locate the study and provide it to the Council. Councilor Tousley said that for him to accept that the at-large system is more inclined to raising taxes, he would need to have more information on those studies. He said that he was elected at large and looks at the entire community when making decisions. None of the councilors ran to raise taxes and this just seems to be a burr under the saddle blanket that didn't need to get tossed there. The entire council is accountable and he believes that the current at-large system is best as it is non-partisan and provides six voices for the entire community.

Councilor Forsmann said that when reviewing Chapter 2, it was decided that because this is a big decision that affects the entire community, it was important to bring this question to the public. She thanked those present for coming and encouraged others to go to the city's website to fill out the survey and let the Council know what they think with regard to this topic. Ms. Forsmann said she believes the at-large system makes most sense, agreeing that Lewiston is not large enough for districts.

Councilor Kleeburg said he looks at the bigger picture for the betterment of the entire community. The Council listens to all citizen comments and it seems to work well under the at-large system.

Sue Pring, Lewiston, said she is in favor of districts as it makes for better competition and will hold individuals accountable. This election format would allow candidates to campaign at a lesser cost as they would not be spreading money through the entire community, and individuals would have a voice within their own area of the community.

Gordy Gregg, Lewiston, indicated that he favors the district approach as it is the most representative for the council. If the city were divided by population, it becomes simple and is not based on party or other factors.

It was noted by Mayor Johnson that precinct boundaries are created by the census. If the City were to move toward District elections, it would make sense to do that when the boundaries are established by the census.

Councilor Kleeburg expressed some concern about District lines changing as more properties are annexed into the city. Mayor Johnson replied that a certain percentage of plus and minus is allowed when those boundaries are drawn. If there was an area with a lot of fast growth, the boundaries could become obsolete very quickly.

City Attorney Gómez encouraged everyone to go to the City's website and complete the survey regarding the type of elections they would like to see for the City of Lewiston.

Councilor Liedkie said she is very grateful for the citizen participation this evening, stressing the importance of hearing from those the council represents. The Council and Mayor want to make the right decisions and long-term investments for the City and public comments assist with this process.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Councilors Tousley and Forsmann moved and seconded adjournment at 6:23 p.m.