

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Magdalena
Carrasco
Councilmember Sergio Jimenez
Councilmember Maya Esparza

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: April 12, 2019

APPROVED:

DATE: 04.12.2019

**SUBJECT: BALLOT MEASURE TO HOLD MAYORAL ELECTIONS
CONCURRENTLY WITH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

RECOMMENDATION

Support a ballot measure to amend the City Charter to hold San Jose mayoral elections concurrently with national presidential elections and place the measure on the November 2020 ballot.

BACKGROUND

The City Charter states that elections for mayor in San Jose shall be held every four years beginning in 1994. The effect of this provision is that mayoral elections are not held concurrently with presidential elections.

The problem with this arrangement is that it discourages high levels of voter participation in elections for mayor, particularly among historically disenfranchised populations such as people of color, women and low-income voters. By changing the mayoral cycle to a presidential year, voter turnout will dramatically improve and more residents will have a say in who represents the city.

According to the Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Center for Local Elections in American Politics' study on direct elections of California mayors, "cities that voluntarily switched to election dates that coincided with midterm or presidential elections saw turnout improve by an average of nearly 15 percentage points." In contrast, San Jose has a dismal record of voter

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turnout in mayoral elections, averaging around 21.5%, about eight percentage points *below* the statewide average.

Figure 7.1: Mayoral Turnout in San Jose 1998–2014

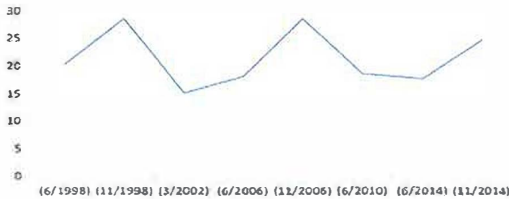
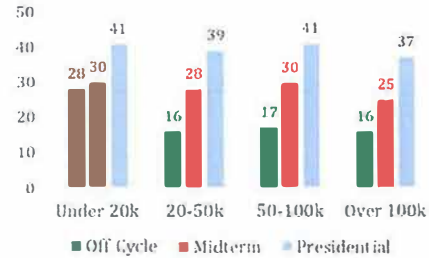


Figure 5.7: Average Turnout by City Size and Election Timing



Citizen involvement in the electoral process improves governance. Candidates recognize they must appeal to a broad electorate. Residents become more knowledgeable about city policies and issues because they have paid attention to mayoral campaigns. Elected mayors will have a stronger mandate to adequately represent the diverse electorate of our City.

While there are many methods to increase voter participation, including traditional voter outreach campaigns, these methods have proven less effective in non-presidential years. Voter participation during mayoral cycles in large cities has been trending downward since 2001. We have the ability to reverse the trend shifting our mayoral election cycle. We need to meet people where they are, and the reality is that people are already more engaged during presidential elections.

The stability and continuity associated with staggered city council terms is reasonable and makes sense. However, there is no valid reason for us to not to place the election of our Mayor – our only citywide elected official – at a date which leads to broad public interest and high levels of voter engagement. This change can be achieved by approving the following two modifications to the charter:

1. Extending the term of the Mayor that begins in 2019 two additional years or holding a special election to fill a two-year term for Mayor; and
2. Beginning in 2024, holding the election of Mayor every four years concurrently with presidential elections.

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This item was sent to the Board of Fair Campaign and Political Practices for review and assessment. The Board in its March letter to the Council unanimously affirmed that “shifting the City’s mayoral election from the gubernatorial cycle to the presidential cycle should result in an increase in voter turnout.”

We value our electorate and believe that with increased voter turnout we will be able to elevate the Office of the Mayor and capture a more diverse constituency that is reflective of our city.

The signers of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City Council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff