



Memorandum

To: CITY COUNCIL

From: Mayor Sam Liccardo

Vice Mayor Jones

**Subject: SAN JOSE MAYORAL
ELECTIONS**

Date: April 12, 2019

Approved:

RECOMMENDATION

1. Consistent with the approach of 19 of the 20 largest U.S. cities, decline to shift the City's mayoral election to the presidential cycle; and
2. Direct Staff and the City Clerk to explore means to increase voter turnout and voter registration for **every** election for **every** seat on the City Council, particularly in underrepresented communities, including consideration of (but not limited to) the following:
 - a. Convene a working group that incorporates community organizations, the County Registrar of Voters, and key community-facing City agencies, such as the Office of Immigrant Affairs, Parks & Recreation, and Libraries & Education, to construct a list of concrete actions that will enhance electoral awareness, increase voter registration, and promote a culture of voting within San Jose. Return to Council within 120 days with a proposed list for Council consideration in advance of the 2020 election cycle, and sooner if such items require consideration in the current budget process. In particular:
 1. Identify trusted messengers and opinion leaders as spokespersons to encourage voting, particularly in underrepresented communities.
 2. Identify media outlets—particularly ethnic media— willing to partner with the City or key organizations to encourage voting
 3. Identify apps, texting tools, social media, and other technological means—including the use of the MySanJose reporting tool—to deliver personalized, non-partisan, pro-voting messages to voters
 4. Identify how City can expand use of its community access channel and a potential City-owned radio station to convey PSA's to encourage voting and registration
 5. Identify myths and perceptions of negative consequences of voting that require consistent counter-messaging
 6. Identify means to promote voting by mail and enrollment as a permanent vote-by-mail voter
 7. Identify any lawful, appropriate means of supporting outreach by the County Registrar to ensure updated voter signatures and elimination of any irregularities that will or have resulted the disqualification of ballots

appropriate registration for those permanent absentee voters whose ballots are likely to be disallowed because

8. Enabling free parking and relaxation of other City restrictions on parking near voting centers on voting days.
 9. Augment the number of "Voter Centers" identified by the Registrar with City facilities—such as by opening space in the lobbies of libraries, community centers, and other conveniently-located City buildings— to substantially improve the access to early voting
 10. Ensure that every City Hall department places voter registration forms and information regarding Election Day on the City's public counters
 11. Provide voter registration links and other messaging on the City's main website, and on the City's community access cable Chanel programming.
 12. Incorporate voter registration and voting reminders within young adult programming through our community centers and programs funded by the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force
 13. Develop a citywide street banner program to remind residents to vote
 14. Provide voter registration materials to utility residential customers, such as through San Jose's Municipal Water System
 15. Leverage partnerships with civic and service organizations to register and educate voters in public locations, such as grocery stores, malls, and college campuses in and near underrepresented communities
 16. Collaborate with school districts within the City to conduct high school civic outreach activities, including scheduled visits and Q & A's by non-candidate elected officials to engage young adults in local issues and spur voter registration
 17. Enhance efforts to provide language assistance to ESL voters
 18. Identify any other opportunities resulting from reforms enacted by the California Secretary of State and the County Registrar of Voters to improve voter turnout.
- b. Return to Council for consideration of a support position of AB 59 (Kalra), prioritizing putting vote centers on college campuses to boost young voter turnout

DISCUSSION

We would like to thank Councilmember Carrasco and our colleagues for raising this important issue and correctly identifying low voter turnout as a serious concern, and we support a process that will help us identify and implement strategies to improve voter participation and engagement. The true question is how do we accomplish the goal of increasing voter participation in a way that is impactful across all elections and not just for one elected position.

The 20 largest cities in the country represent a broad range of thought across the political spectrum. But even including what is considered the most progressive cities in the country, 19 of America's 20 largest cities do not align their mayoral election cycles with the presidential cycle. Simply changing the election cycle for one of the eleven members of the San Jose City Council will not fix the needed improvement in civic engagement for elections in all eleven Council districts, and for five of them, it will make things worse. The problem of low voter turnout is not unique to mayoral

elections: we had closely contested elections in four council districts in 2014, yet fewer than 17,400 voters participated in the November election in District 1, fewer than 14,000 voters participated in Districts 3 and 7, and less than 8,300 voters participated in the decisive June election in District 5. Each of those districts has a population of more than 100,000.

San Jose should become a leader in civic engagement for all of our elections, and re-arranging the date of the election for one seat will not get us there. We propose exploring the approach of organizations like the NAACP, whose Florida's civic engagement campaign helped generate record midterm early voting among voters of color, including a 77% increase among African-American voters during the 2018 election. By combining their ideas with those studied and considered by such entities as the Los Angeles Municipal Elections Reform Commission, and with a sustained engagement effort by City of San Jose and trusted community partners, we can create lasting change.

Any proposed change of the mayoral election schedule raises several unintended consequences that require discussion. First, mayoral elections should engage residents and candidates in important conversations about our pressing local issues, such as homelessness, traffic, crime, parks, transit infrastructure, affordable housing, and urban development. The overheated rhetoric and intense partisanship of national presidential politics consume every minute of media and public attention in the weeks leading up to Election Day, crowding out attention on these local issues. The cacophony of news reports and social media of Trump's tweets or Bernie's barbs makes it difficult for residents to hear messages and discuss issues relevant to our own neighborhoods. Second, shifting the mayoral election date will likely increase voter turnout for the mayoral contest, but will do so at the cost of making orphans out of five council district races. That is, odd-numbered Council districts in San José will be unfairly disadvantaged by remaining on the gubernatorial cycle, while a high-profile mayor's contest that would likely help voter turnout shifts two years away.

Data gathered from the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters reveal a nexus between contested mayoral races and increased voter turnout in gubernatorial cycles in San José.¹ Using the average County-wide voter turnout as a control variable, we see that in the years 2006 and 2014 (when the races for Mayor were highly contested) turnout increased in November by several percent compared to the elections in 2010 and 2018. Shifting the cycle will exacerbate the "turnout gap" between higher-turnout, even-numbered districts and lower-turnout odd-numbered districts. It bears mentioning that the three districts with the least affluent, most ethnically diverse electorates — Districts 3, 5, and 7 — would suffer the most from this shift.

Year	County (minus SJ) turnout	San Jose turnout	Difference
2018	51%	41%	10%
2014	37%	33%	4%
2010	51%	40%	11%
2006	42%	37%	5%

¹ <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/rov/Resources/Pages/PastEResults.aspx>

With the exception of San Diego, none of the twenty most populous cities in the United States align their mayoral elections with the presidential contest (see last page). If anything, voter turnout is uniquely enhanced in San Jose as one of only three cities that aligns with *any* other electoral cycle. Indeed, other cities are also pursuing strategies to increase voter participation, but share a consensus to decline to shift municipal elections to the presidential cycle. After a dismal turnout for Los Angeles' 2013 Mayoral election, the City Council voted to align future elections with the state gubernatorial cycle—but tellingly, not with the presidential election.

We must promote voter engagement and turnout for all of our elections, and we need to do so in a way that preserves a focus on local issues over perennial national dysfunction. The good news is that both the State of California and Santa Clara County have also recently enacted changes to make it easier to register and vote. I have listed a number of additional approaches that should be discussed and considered.

Mayoral election cycles in the most populous cities

Cities that consolidate Mayoral elections with Presidential elections:

- San Diego, CA, November 2020

Cities that consolidate Mayoral elections with Gubernatorial Elections:

- San Jose, CA, June 2022
- Austin, TX, November 2022
- Los Angeles, CA, November 2022 – (Changed for the first time, previously held in an off-cycle election)

Cities that DO NOT consolidate Mayoral elections with Presidential elections OR Gubernatorial elections:

- Chicago, IL, February 2019
- Jacksonville, FL, March 2019
- Phoenix, AZ, November 2019
- Dallas, TX, May 2019
- Denver, CO, May 2019
- Fort Worth, TX, May 2019
- San Antonio, TX, May 2019
- Columbus, OH, November 2019
- Houston, TX, November 2019
- Indianapolis, IN, November 2019
- San Francisco, CA, November 2019
- Philadelphia, PA, November 2019
- El Paso, TX, May 2021
- Charlotte, NC, November 2021
- Los Angeles, CA, November 2022
- New York City, November 2021
- Seattle, WA, November 2021