



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF THE ANN ARBOR AREA  
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**Talking Points for City Council Work Session**  
**July 6, 2015**

We want to thank Council members for inviting us to this work session. Elections and voting are near and dear to our hearts and we are very happy to be included in this conversation. We applaud City Council for giving serious consideration to two election reform proposals this evening, proposals which will affect each of you quite directly.

Last spring the League sponsored two community forums on Ann Arbor Elections—AA Elections, What works? What doesn't? and AA Elections: Exploring Options. Why did we bring this topic to the community? Because we are concerned that city officials are being elected by a very small percentage of voters in the August primaries and that the November election is virtually meaningless in terms of electing our local officials.

Our current mayor won the August 2014 primary with a total of 7073 votes. The number of registered voters in the city of Ann Arbor is around 104,000. We know the number of registered voters is hotly contested; nevertheless, even if it were 70,000 registered voters, the results would still represent a very small percentage of Ann Arbor voters.

City council members won primary races with 1100 - 3000 votes. All of these winners went on to essentially uncontested races in the general election.

What does the League look for in elections and what are our concerns about AA elections?

1. Each and every vote matters. Making our voices heard through voting is an essential part of the democratic process. With our current partisan system, where

the only election that matters is the party primary election, the votes in the multi-party general election don't really matter.

2. We believe that broad-based participation in elections is essential to healthy government. If citizens across the community, representing a wide spectrum of ages, interest groups, political views, geographic distribution, and economic situations, participate in elections, the results will provide us with elected officials who represent that diversity and will work to serve the entire community. The way things stand now in Ann Arbor it is a small group of dedicated voters who are not on vacation and are paying attention to local politics who vote in the primaries. The broadest popular representation at the polls is in November. However, the decision has likely already been made in an essentially one-party city by those who voted in the partisan primary.
3. We want strong candidates and good choices in every election, not just in the primary. Because of the current lack of balance between the two major parties in our city, there are often no real contests in November. Serious candidates won't put themselves forward if they are sure to lose. That brings our less likely candidates who are certainly entitled to run but who have been known to make a mockery or charade out of "politics" and the office in the public eye.
4. We want strong voter turnout. If there are strong candidates on the ballot and a real contest, voters will be motivated to show up and vote. A high voter turnout makes candidates and elected officials more responsive to the citizenry. There is evidence that the frequency of elections has a strongly negative influence on turnout. (See link below.) Voters are willing to "gear up" for an election only so often. November is when those numbers are the highest due to other contests—local, state, federal—as well as ballot and millage proposals.

At this point, the League membership has not had an opportunity to study the two proposals being presented tonight and has not taken a position on either. However, both proposals appear to be a step in the right direction. We leave to council the important work of deciding which changes in our current system would benefit the community most. The League stands ready to assist in any way we can.

If and when, Council decides to bring a proposal before the voters, the League will then carefully study its pros and cons and decide whether or not to support it. In any case, we will be actively engaged in voter education on any proposal brought forward.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak before you and we are here to answer any questions you may have.

<http://www.vnews.com/home/17281148-95/want-more-people-to-vote-ask-them-to-vote-less-often>