



DISCUSSION ITEM
CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
June 13, 2019

Department Administration

Director Approval Craig Whitehead

DISCUSSION ITEM Placing on the 2019 November Ballot the question of increasing the number of commissioners from three to five, and whether to be elected at-large or by districts.

BACKGROUND The City Commission has discussed several times the issue of whether to place on this November's ballot the question of increasing the commission from three to five and whether elected at-large, as is currently, or by districts. The Commission held a Special Meeting on April 17 as a public forum for this topic (see attachment number one). Also attached is an example resolution.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. April 17 Special Commission Meeting Notes
2. Example Resolution – At Large

**Special Commission Meeting
Public Input on Increasing Commission from Three to Five Members
April 17, 2019**

Mayor Ysusi called the meeting to order. He went over the ground rules, including requiring speakers to fill out a card to speak and limiting speakers to three minutes.

Dean Hayse, 2625 Rolling Green Drive – Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on the issue of the number of City Commissioners.

What most of us want from the City government is simply for it to work. Maybe even work well. When this question of the number of commissioners came up, one of the first questions I ask was what is not working? What about the Commission of three members would be solved by the Commission of five members?

It seems that three Commissioners can be cumbersome and slow. Progress is limited to very brief and very busy formal meetings. Where there is no way to form a committee of Commissioners to investigate or research an issue. You must either work alone or work as the whole Commission. So, the effort to flesh out thoughts and opinions before presenting in public is solitary work with no real peer available to serve as a sounding board or as a critic. These situations would be solved by a five-member Commission.

Still, some voters lack trust in their elected officials, and fear committees or meetings without the Open Meetings Act coverage will not be in their best interest. They fear shady deals might be made and once exposed would further erode the trust in government.

What is it that is not working? Three Commissioners might not be representative. One Commissioner for every 3,000 people. Is that it? I don't think so. In larger communities, a single Commissioner represents tens of thousands of people.

Is the problem lack of opportunity? Only three means it's harder to get elected. With five slots, it would be easier to get elected. Maybe more people would throw their hat in the ring. People would see that opportunity, become engaged, and step up to serve as a Commissioner. That might be good.

But, some voters lack trust in the quality of the pool of candidates and fear a poorly qualified or otherwise substandard pool of candidates might be the result and once in office they would be unproductive and create unnecessary turmoil.

With either three or five Commissioners, it ultimately is crucial to the citizens of Independence that the community encourage persons who have the skills and talent, and the best interests of the community at heart, to step up to serve in the City Commission. I know you all have encouraged others to run for the office which I think is good and appropriate.

My point tonight is, whether we have three or five Commissioners, I believe it is in the community's best interest to stay with an at-large election for City Commission. Dividing the City into wards or districts to select its Commissioners simply creates artificial barriers to enter for candidates and thus dilutes the pool of potential candidates for the office. Potential candidates are already not running because the job is perceived as thankless and difficult. We do not need additional barriers to entry for them by excluding

them certain seats on the Commission because of their address. What's more, dividing the City into wards or districts creates barriers between the citizens themselves when, more than ever, what we need to be seeking ways to break down real and perceive boundaries and barriers that separate us from each other. Let's stay with at-large elections for City Commissioners.

Please consider these comments as you discuss your action on this matter. Thank you.”

Richard Folk, 1217 N 4th – I’ve been a home-owner, own my own home, retired, I have found that since I have lived here over 50 years, I have seen a lot of changes in City government and different phases. When independence was young, in the 50-80’s, Independence could do with three members on the Commission, but as time went on, government has gotten more complex and more involved in different aspect of the government. In order to carry out the different aspects, in order to function properly and be thorough, you need more than three members. If something was to happen, what if one person was out of town and then something happened with a major thing? You might communicate by phone; but this person might be needed here in town. I think in my opinion that City would best be served and be diversified with a five member verses a three member. Better results, then compared to what we do now.

Robert Pierce, 3444 W. Main – Was here before most of the people [former Mayors] on the walls. I have seen three Commissioners get along well together, I’ve seen two gang up on one and one of your Commissioners has been subject to that, but I’m not going to name names. Was the outsider, but he persevered. I personally believe that diversity is good. If you get a wide variety of candidates running, let me ask a question, all elected by the majority, that’s not a problem. It gives you more people and not two ganging up on one anymore. Wider variety of ideas. I am for a five-member Commission.

Jim Kelly, 309 S 5th – Having served on a three-member Commission for 6 years, a 7-member school board for 8 years, a 125-member chamber of the State house of representatives for 9 years. The numbers don’t make a lot of difference. three members of the Commission went well, school board went well. Not objected to five. Not going “at large” would be a very big mistake. I believe in our size elected “at large”. The ward type system would generate the possibility of little areas of the City being the focus and not the City as a whole. If one of you excellent Commissioners moved outside the ward, you would no longer be on the Commission. The five is fine, not going “at large” would be a huge mistake. In visiting with others across the state, the ward would be a big mistake. The “at large” gives the best representation, and best representation to the City. The “at large” five would be the way to go.

Commissioner Caflich – Tonight is good to start the conversation. We want input from the community to see what direction we should go. A lot of possibilities. The majority of cities operate with Mayor/Council form of government with a City Administrator or City Manager. You are looking at up to 7 members. Most of the Class I and Class II cities look at wards for four, then three at large. A combination of “at large” and in districts. There are a lot of things to consider if we look at expanding. There is a lot of information to take in and see what we should do for the City and your input is beneficial, how you see the government, what you have seen in the past, and where we should go in the future.

Commissioner Hogsett – I have been on another City Commission with five members. There are some real advantages to a five-person Commission. When we have a business meeting we try to get through our business. I would love to understand more about ADA, Commissioner Cafilisch is an expert and I would love to have lunch with him and talk about ADA and help me understand it. When I was on City Commission in Baldwin City we could do that. Now your preparation for the meeting is one-person preparation, can't discuss with other Commissioners, there are things I would ask you in private, but not in public. I get some people saying that is not open government. I'm not going to ask for an hour-long explanation from Commissioner Cafilisch in public with 50 people sitting in the audience. Easier with a five-member Commission. This is handcuffed. I would not want the ward system personally. If we went to five, and had five districts, then you've got to have 10 candidates, and if no one was running, you might have three that want to run. Definitely support a five-member Commission "at large". I would not support it with wards.

Mayor Ysusi – Part of the reason for us to go with worksessions is it would give us the ability to sit and talk about items we wanted to put on the agenda, and bounce ideas. Not a decision-making process, a worksession. But we had an opportunity to hear Gary's intake on an issue, Commissioner Cafilisch's intake and my intake. Better understanding of what we were thinking, and had a chance to take that in. Use that as we are moving forward. In the past we have had some issues that were brought up that the Commissioners didn't have the time to sit down and really look at those particular issues. Sometimes they were presented in a manner, and the pressure was to act on this issue before we leave the building, and sitting where you are sitting, I have seen this happen, where they were pressured to make decisions. Either table it or set up another meeting to hash some of this out. That was the purpose to have these worksessions planned. Then we all bring our ideas to that. That is one way we might be able to be more effective. It is an open session, like you are here tonight, so you hear what topics we are considering and what our thinking is and get an idea of where we might go on a decision down the road. That was our agreement to help us navigate and sit down and talk with each other. Bring items we wanted to discuss and discuss them for as long as we wanted to. I understand your take, and your take and my take.

Commissioner Cafilisch – Good information to hear from diversity, we need a Commission that is diverse. Districts is one way to do it, but it might not be the best. Get encouragement from the whole cross section to be willing to serve as Commissioners. Backgrounds are essential in the knowledge to operate the City, and Louis with his experience working in a large cooperation and my background is ADA, that we all bring something unique to the Commission that we can come together and share. All of us are expanding our horizons too, their work experience from whatever. Trade professions, continued process of learning to serve. I agree with Louis on work session that it opens a door to share ideas and thoughts on various topics. Providing that extra extension of the Commission. We never want a lack of trust, or to create a lack of trust, we represent you, we want to have these sessions, public forums so we can be open before the public. Our emails and phone numbers are out there. I appreciate everyone coming and sharing tonight, please let us know your comments.

Mayor Ysusi – We would be glad to hear from you. I hear this from people out in the community. You find it in any level of government. There seems to be a disconnect somewhere between the people and

the elected officials. At this level if the public feels like they are not able to trust us then myself, as Commissioner, I'm not doing a good job. I need to address issues you bring to me and move them forward and get back with you and get an answer. At some point, so you know I have addressed that. There is . . . you try to be accountable, and transparent as legally as you can. There are certain things we are privy to we can't share with the public, it stays collectively with us, and there are reasons why. I try to work on, to be up front as much as I can legally be. I work for the people that elected me, and that is it that is my only job and I take it seriously and I will continue to do that. I've made myself available to people, never turned down a question, no matter what it is, or where it is asked. At Walmart or the car wash or ball games with the grandkids. I always take the time to answer questions and if I need to get back with you, I do that. I didn't have experience in a governmental setting but had experience with Westar and AT&T and what they did that was efficient and what wasn't. I try to incorporate that. If folks feel like we need to do more then I will step up my game. Anything else?

Commissioner Hogsett – I have had two close friends that think going to five is terrible, because we can't get five qualified people, which is nonsense considering the number of people that live here that all would be qualified. I think that more people don't run because they don't want to be embarrassed running against someone that will get many more votes. If you increase the number of seats there will be more people step up and be willing to run. I think it would be valuable. When I wrote a column for the newspaper I went to every City's website, I could only find 10 in the state that had three, all the others had five or more. Jim Kelly thought three was an okay number, but I prefer five rather than three.

Commissioner Caflich – I've had comments that three was enough and it worked. What we are doing here, we are getting information, we had four share their comments and concerns and this is a start so that we make a decision that is best for the community. The community should benefit. We don't want to go backwards or cause other problems.

Mayor Ysusi – A couple of people commented that they felt like three has served us well up to now and would like to see it stay at three. You have our email addresses and phone numbers, if you don't then when the meeting adjourns you can contact us.

Commissioner Caflich moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Hogsett. The meeting adjourned at 6 PM.

RESOLUTION NO. 2019-XXX

BE IT RESOLVED by the Governing Body of the City of Independence, Kansas:

Section 1. The Governing Body finds it advisable to increase the number of City Commissioners from three (3) to five (5) to be elected at large.

Section 2. The Governing Body hereby requests the Montgomery County Clerk to include at the next general election a ballot question to the electors residing within the corporate boundaries of the City of Independence the following questions:

Should the number of City Commissioners of the City of Independence be increased from three (3) to five (5) to be elected at large?

Adopted by the Governing Body of the City of Independence, Kansas, on the 11th day of July 2019.

LOUIS YSUSI, Mayor

ATTEST:

DAVID SCHWENKER, City Clerk/Treasurer