

# ADVISORY QUESTION NO. 1

## Amendment to the Mesquite City Code

This question is advisory only. Shall the Mesquite City Code be amended to allow the City's Primary and General Elections to be held on the same even numbered year election cycle as the Clark County Elections, effective for the 2016 election cycle?

Yes .....

No .....

### EXPLANATION

The proposed amendment to the Mesquite City Code would authorize the Mesquite City Council to change the current odd numbered year city elections to coincide with Clark County even numbered year elections. The term of office would be extended by a one-time addition of 17 months to each of the elected city officers holding office at the time the ordinance becomes effective in order to coincide with this amendment.

Currently, the Mesquite city elections are held on an odd numbered year election cycle. In amending the Code, electors would be voting to change the current odd year election cycle to an even numbered year election cycle. Electors would also be approving a one-time extension of City-elected officers' term of office to be effective during the 2016 election cycle.

The question is purely advisory and does not place any legal requirement on any local government, any member of local government, or any officer of the county or the Nevada Legislature.

**A "YES" vote would authorize the Mesquite City Council to amend the current City Code to change the odd numbered year election cycle to Clark County even numbered year election cycle, effective 2016.**

**A "NO" vote would retain the existing City Code and odd-numbered year elections.**

### ARGUMENT ADVOCATING PASSAGE

This Advisory Question gives voters the opportunity to change City of Mesquite (City) government processes without cutting services. If approved, it should reduce the cost of city elections and increase voter turnout for city elections.

Every two years, the City budgets about \$40,000 for a city election. The majority of that budgeted amount goes to Clark County Elections Department (CC) to manage city elections, including such things as transporting, securing and maintaining voting machines, printing and mailing ballots, paying poll workers, public notices, tallying votes, etc. The City does not pay additional cost for state/federal elections. By consolidating city elections with state/federal elections, the City should be able to reduce election costs.

Mesquite voters vote in two elections each year—city primary and general elections in odd-numbered years, and state/federal primary and general elections in even-numbered years. With the proposed change, Mesquite voters will vote every two years instead of every year and will elect city council members and a mayor during state/federal elections. This change should have positive impact on voter turnout since an average of 6% more Mesquite voters turned out for state/federal elections than for city elections during the period of 2005 to 2010.

Consolidating city elections with state/federal elections will move city elections forward one year. Because Nevada statutes prohibit the shortening of any term of office, there will be a one-time extension of terms of office for all sitting council members and mayor. *For example*, if the City implements even-year elections in 2016, council members elected in 2013 would stand for re-election in 2018 instead of 2017, and council members elected in 2015 would stand for re-election in 2020 instead of 2019. Once the transition cycle is completed, terms of office for all council members and the mayor will be four years.

*Submitted by Ballot Question Committee as provided for in NRS 295.217*

### **ARGUMENT OPPOSING PASSAGE**

*The statements contained in the argument below are based on the opinion submitted by the Committee Opposing the Ballot Question. No factual documentation for this argument was verified or provided by the Committee.*

Focused, well-contested local elections around candidates and local ballot issues are necessary for a healthy community and a greater voter turnout. A “NO” vote would assure us of maintaining an election cycle that has worked successfully for the citizens of Mesquite since its incorporation.

For the past 26 years, Mesquite citizens have focused on state and national issues in even numbered years and local issues in the odd numbered years, giving thoughtful attention to both partisan and nonpartisan elections. It is obvious by Mesquite’s voting record and turnout that our community members are passionately involved in state and federal elections, yet our citizens also avidly debate our ever-changing mix of local issues and then elect our mayor and city council persons with just as high a turnout. Our limited electoral time and money stretch further because our City has separated these very elections. Shifting to even years would change the very nature of our local elections by making it more expensive to reach the public in a highly competitive and partisan environment. There would not be space and time to articulate the local issues and the critical choices that make a difference on the local level. “NO” on the question will prevent the potential to reduce local election intensity by losing local candidates amongst numerous federal and state candidates.

It is a fact that our municipal election races would be at the end of the ballot just before the ballot questions. A ballot question or questions specific to Mesquite on an already long, combined national and statewide ballot could get lost and not receive the representative return for the population. In addition, political signage would be greatly increased during a time when signage is already overcrowded. Is this what we want?

It may be that some money might be saved by combining elections. However, that possible savings is undermined and cannot be verified by the City. Estimates from comparisons of other like communities show the savings as insignificant.

Voting “NO” on this important question is a vote to preserve democracy in Mesquite.

*Submitted by Ballot Question Committee as provided for in NRS 295.217.*

### **REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT OPPOSING PASSAGE**

Mesquite voters are being asked to decide if they will vote in two elections every year or will vote in two elections every two years. They are not being asked to give up local elections, their voting privileges or the democratic election process.

Combining local elections with state/federal elections may: 1) reduce costs; 2) increase voter turnout since more voters participate in state/federal elections; and 3) encourage local candidates to increase communication with voters so they have information to make decisions about local candidates and issues.

Since many local issues are affected by the decisions of elected state and federal representatives, a combined election gives voters a greater voice by voting for representatives and initiatives at all levels of government in one election. Mesquite voters should have no difficulty finding local candidates and issues on a combined election ballot.

Political signs are part of Mesquite's landscape because elections are held every year. By combining elections, signs and campaign activities would be confined to every other year.

A one-time extension of council member terms of office is necessary to adjust to a new election cycle. Voters can minimize the impact of that extension by careful consideration of the candidates they elect.

*Submitted by Ballot Question Committee as provided for in NRS 295.217.*

### **REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT ADVOCATING PASSAGE**

The budgeted amount for local elections is only two-tenths of one percent of our city's annual budget. Consolidating city elections with state and federal elections will not eliminate our election expenses. The City of Mesquite may be required to enter an inter-local agreement with Clark County requiring us to help financially support the costs of both local and state elections. Any savings would be insignificant.

Higher voter turnout occurs when there is less outsourcing of city services, the use of direct democracy, and more control in the hands of elected rather than appointed officials. The population boom in Mesquite over the past five years accounted in part for the increased number of voters in state and federal elections. Local ballot questions combined with nonpartisan local candidates tend to bring about the higher voter turnout desired.

A "NO" vote on this question preserves a time-tested, democratic system for electing local leadership.

*Submitted by Ballot Question Committee as provided for in NRS 295.217.*

## **FISCAL NOTE**

If this advisory question is approved by the voters of Mesquite and the Mesquite City Council chooses to consider legislation that would amend the Mesquite City Code to reflect the consolidation of its elections with Clark County, there would be a financial impact upon the local city government. The amended City Code would specify the one-time extension of term each elected officer currently holding office shall receive in order to coincide with the Clark County election cycle.

If this advisory question is approved by the voters of Mesquite, elected officials who are elected during the June 2011 Mesquite General Election would continue to serve 17 months beyond the June 2015 term end date. Elected officers shall continue to receive compensation and benefits until the end of the term served.

If this advisory question is approved by the voters of Mesquite, City elected officers may enter into an inter-local agreement with Clark County to negotiate financial support for the conduct of Mesquite city elections.