



City of North Liberty

Ward System Election, November 8, 2011

The City of North Liberty received a petition in May, 2011, requesting a change in the city's representation plan from an at-large Council system to a five-ward system. The petition was signed by 137 residents of the City of North Liberty. On the November 8 ballot, voters will be asked to consider a change of the representation plan to an "all ward" system or to keep the City's current representation plan of an at-large system.

An "at-large" system is defined as the entire community voting for each candidate. To the contrary, an "all ward" system is when the voters of an established ward (a defined area of the city) vote for only the candidates running in a specific area. In this case, if the proposed plan was approved, the City, in conjunction with the County Auditor, would establish five wards by dividing the current population of the city equally. The Mayor would be the only position elected at large. The Mayor and council members would serve four-year staggered terms, just as they do now. Should the "all ward" representation plan be approved, the entire council will be up for reelection at the next regular City election in 2013.

Precincts

The City just completed the update to its precinct plan, which is a process required by all municipalities, counties and states after each decennial census. A precinct is defined as "one of several districts into which a city or town is divided for voting purposes." Precincts are specifically sized to facilitate ease of voters. The maximum population per precinct allowed is 3,500. Smaller precincts equal less waiting time at polls on Election Day. North Liberty revised its precinct ordinance, establishing six precincts, effective January 2012, to accommodate the population increase since 2000 and anticipated future growth. Precincts line are drawn on geographical boundaries focusing on contiguous property and inclusion of polling places as well as population as derived from Census Tract data.

If the ward representation plan is selected, the City would be required to reprecinct. Five wards means that the City needs a multiple of five precincts (five, ten, fifteen, etc.) as determined by the Council according to the County Auditor. Each precinct must be fully contained in one ward.

In summary, precincts are specific to polling place and wards are specific to the representation of a voter.

Other Frequently Asked Questions

Is a ward system common in Iowa?

Yes, many cities operate with a ward system. However, a vast majority of ward systems in Iowa also have at-large seats. Ames, for example, has four ward Councilors and two at-large Councilors. Mt. Pleasant, also has four ward Councilors and two at-large Councilors. In these cases, everyone in the community votes for the at-large seats while just those in the specific ward vote for that seat.

What happens if a ward does not have a candidate willing to run for office?

The City Council can appoint a citizen from that ward to serve on the Council. If the Council appoints someone, the public can still submit a petition requesting a special election to place that seat on an upcoming ballot. The City has paid about \$3,500 per special election in the last five years.

If the all ward system is approved, can I still vote for the Mayor position?

Yes. The Mayor position will still be at-large if the proposed system is approved, allowing all voters to cast a vote for the Mayor race.

If the all ward system is approved, can I still vote for all City Council seats?

No. With an all ward system, you will only be able to vote for the race in your ward and the Mayor's race. In the case when your ward does not have a seat up for election and the Mayor seat is not up for election, you will not vote in that year. In other words, you will be able to vote only for the one City Council seat in your ward.