



SHOULD I RUN FOR ELECTED OFFICE?

INTRODUCTION

This document provides general information about life as an elected official in the City of Alexandria. It is based in part on legal requirements outlining the duties and responsibilities of the City's elected officials – but is more heavily based on the experiences of elected officials that have lived the role. It provides food for thought as you decide whether to travel down the path toward election and is provided as part of the packet of additional materials, which is made available at City Hall. Those materials contain the facts about how to run, what your candidacy obligations are, and how the election will unfold. This document, on the other hand, addresses the initial questions you personally may have before deciding whether to take the next step in running for office.

COUNCIL GENERALLY

The City Council is an elected body that has administrative and legislative authority over City business. The City is divided into five wards with one Council Member per ward. Presently there are two wards with two precincts which gives the City a total of seven voting precincts within the City limits. City Council members are elected by the voters of the ward in which they reside.

The Mayor is not considered a voting member of the City Council and only votes in the case of a tie. The Mayor does preside over meetings and performs other duties as described in the Home Rule Charter. Most notably, the Mayor has command and control of the police force. The Mayor serves a four-year term and Council Members serve four-year terms which are staggered every two years. City elections are held on even-numbered years. The Mayor is elected by all the voters of the City. Elected offices are all non-partisan.

Council members receive yearly compensation of \$7,148. The Mayor receives \$9,274 per year. These amounts are subject to tax deductions. The Mayor and City Council are also paid an additional \$50 per diem for Special City Council meetings.



WHY SHOULD YOU DO IT?

People seek to serve their community as elected officials for various reasons. Regardless of the motive, if you are contemplating serving your community as a member of City Council, you should be prepared for the demands, expectations and rewards that come with the role. Although the legal requirements for serving require only that you attend the scheduled meetings of the Council and perform the duties as described in the Home Rule Charter, the City of Alexandria has a proud tradition of active and involved elected officials who often exceed the minimum requirements. As an elected official in Alexandria, much more so than as a single voter, you will have a say in such important matters as how the City grows, what the street system will be like in the future, where and how development takes place, what the level of City provided services are and will be that benefit you and your neighbors, and perhaps most importantly, how the City's annual budget will be allocated. It is a responsibility best met with energy, enthusiasm, and conscientiousness. The Council sets public policy and sound policy decisions are the result of hard work. Thus, elected officials in the City are encouraged, albeit not legally required, to do outside the-meeting work to review meeting materials, educate themselves about the public policy issues, interact with constituents and other elected officials, educate and inform constituents, attend meetings with other agencies and governments, serve on appointed committees, and act as liaisons with other agencies as directed by the Council

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

Recalling the old adage that "no good deed goes unpunished," it can sometimes seem like all you ever hear from are aggrieved citizens. Happily (and hopefully just when you need it), you will see the benefits of a Council decision play out for the good of the community or you will occasionally get a much needed "thank-you." You will share the podium with others with a deep concern for the City and its citizens. Sometimes, and for periods even frequently, you won't agree with all of your fellow elected officials but you will be expected to disagree with professionalism and respect. Elected officials come from different backgrounds and have strengths different from yours but you will have a bond with them regardless because you have a common goal.



TIME COMMITMENTS

Your experience as an elected official will be what you make of it. There are few legally required time commitments and those are marked with an asterisk below. The rest of the commitments set forth in this Section are obligations that Council members in the City have traditionally taken on -- and historically with zeal.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

Regular meetings*

City Council meets on the second and fourth Mondays of the month. When a meeting falls on a Monday holiday, the Council meeting is rescheduled to an alternate date acceptable to a majority of the Council, typically the following Tuesday.

Special meetings*

From time to time, additional meetings are scheduled, known as “work sessions” when the press of business requires additional meeting time. Typically no action is taken at these meetings. These meetings are often held immediately prior to City Council meetings, and may involve being at City Hall as early as 4:00 p.m.

The Council may also occasionally hold a full day or two weekday work sessions to address comprehensive subjects such as strategic planning.

Meeting Packet Review

In advance of Council meetings, packets of meeting materials are provided to the Council members on the preceding Thursday. Review of the packet can take several hours and Council members are encouraged to send any questions raised by such materials to appropriate City staff by Monday morning to allow time for questions to be addressed before or at the Monday evening meeting.

Training

Newly elected officials are strongly encouraged to attend training sessions with City staff to become familiar with a variety of important subjects related to their service. The City is a member of the League of Minnesota Cities, which has significant resources and training opportunities available for newly elected officials



Council Committees/liaison duties

The City has many internal advisory committees to research and provide guidance to Council on setting public policy. In addition, there are other governmental and quasi-governmental authorities that provide important public services to the City of Alexandria. Time constraints of working Council members are considered when assigning committee liaison duties; however, each Council member is asked to serve a liaison role. Time commitment will vary and meetings could be day or evenings.

Ad hoc committee or Council subcommittee participation

From time to time, the City convenes committees which include elected councilmembers to review proposals for services contracts, or consider special issues that come before the city. Each Council member is asked to volunteer some time to one or more of these committees. Time commitment will vary.

Individual constituent interaction

Constituents expect Council members to be available to communicate via electronic mail and phone calls about constituent concerns and to be diligent and consistent in following up and communicating such follow up back to the constituent.

Miscellaneous time commitments

Beyond the duties listed above, Council members are often asked to be present at ribbon cuttings, local ceremonies and community events, and important City traditions.

Additional Mayoral time commitments.

As noted previously, the Mayor is not a voting member of the Council, but does serve several important roles per the Home Rule Charter.. These duties often require an additional time commitment beyond that of a Council Member

Liaison/ committee membership responsibilities

By ordinance, the Mayor is a member of the City's Budget Committee, Personnel Committee and Liquor Commission and is expected to attend these meetings. The Mayor may also be asked to take on additional liaison responsibilities or subcommittee roles as with any Council member. Time commitment will vary and meetings could be during the day or in the evening.



Individual constituent intermediary

In addition to handling individual constituent concerns brought to the direct attention of the Mayor, the Mayor is often called upon to act as an intermediary with constituent concerns of a broader nature or when a constituent is dissatisfied with the level of follow up or solution offered by another at the City.

Miscellaneous time commitments

In addition to attendance at ribbon cuttings, local ceremonies and community events as with other Council members, the Mayor is most often requested to appear and speak at events such as community events, business openings, city events and regional group meetings.

As the presiding officer at Council meetings, the Mayor also communicates with the City Administrator regarding upcoming meeting agendas and other logistical issues regarding City Council meetings.



CAN YOU MAKE IT WORK?

Knowing now what the legal and traditional time commitments are, prospective candidates should evaluate their professional and personal situation and ask: Will your job allow the flexibility to be at City Hall by 6:45 p.m. (and often times earlier) on Monday evenings? Do you have time late week and over the weekend to review the packets? Will your professional and personal life allow for (and hopefully even support) you in attending occasional evening work sessions? Will you be able to commit to the occasional working group or focus group meetings, which are sometimes held during afternoon or evening hours? Are you organized in a manner which will allow you to interact with your constituents while still allowing you uninterrupted personal and/or professional time? (These constituent interactions can include emails, phone calls, meeting residents for coffee, attending occasional meetings or special meetings called by a couple of residents, and/or being asked to walk an area where there are concerns.)

Are you willing and able to occasionally serve on City-formed ad hoc committees (for example, selection committees for appointing officials to Boards and Commissions)? Do you have an interest in attending various community events? (Ribbon-cutting ceremonies, Awards Ceremonies, annual luncheons are examples.)

MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION

If, after evaluation, you decide to go for it, you will learn more about the City, its issues, your neighbors, effective political exchange of ideas, time management, and being a public figure than you can imagine. The City's elected officials feel it is a rewarding important role that they fulfill and, like most important and enriching roles that people take on, it has its hills and valleys. Make the decision to run with your eyes wide open but remember -- most of the City's elected officials choose to run for a second term and that fact alone sums it all up.