

July 27, 2012

News Release

*For Immediate Release*

## **Charter Change Goes to Voters Despite New State Law**

Springfield City Council voted to place three Charter issues on the Aug. 7 ballot: a request to eliminate February primary elections and two ballot questions requesting changes to the initiative petition process.

**The first ballot question** is a proposal to eliminate the February primary election for City Council elections where there are more than two candidates for a Council seat. Council had placed the question on the ballot because recent elections had resulted in a less than five percent turnout - the cost per vote to the citizens of Springfield estimated at approximately \$32 each.

Even though Council had already placed this question on the August ballot, on July 12, 2012, Governor Jay Nixon signed into law HB 1036. That bill eliminates the February election date for all city issues except bond elections. HB 1036 also eliminates the June election from the City's consideration. The elimination of the February election date effectively removes the February primary election date set out in Section 13.1 of the Springfield City Charter.

While the new state law has eliminated the February election date, the necessary language to clean up section 13.1 of the City Charter will still be voted on at the August 7, 2012 election.

If citizens pass the ballot measure eliminating the City's February primary, the citizens of Springfield will save the cost of a future election that would be necessary to make sure that our election dates comply with state law.

As a result, the question seeking to amend section 13.1 of the Charter is still a question that will be voted on by the voters of Springfield.

If the citizens do not pass the ballot measure, the February primary election will still be eliminated, but the City's Charter and State law will be out of synch.

**The second Charter issue** involves a proposal to increase the number of signatures required to place an initiative issue on an election ballot. Currently, a petition has to have at least the number of signatures equal to 10 percent of voters in the most recent municipal election. The proposed change would require signatures equaling seven percent of all registered voters eligible to vote at the most recent April election (the City's general election).

**The third Charter proposal** would tweak the initiative petition process to set up a one-year time limit for a group to gather signatures to place an initiative question to a vote by the citizens.

The other tweaks would change the administrative requirements for the City staff to process an initiative petition.

These administrative requirement changes include:

- Requirement of a petitioners' committee comprised of five qualified voters to submit a proposed petitioner to the City Clerk.
- Requirement the committee obtain an advisory legal opinion and a fiscal summary from the City Director of Finance that contains anticipated implementation cost to the City and suggested funding source.

**The last change** contained in the third ballot question would allow Council, by a vote of at least seven members, to amend or delete invalid language or correct typographical errors prior to an election. The petitioners' committee will also be allowed to withdraw the petition for any reason up to the 6th Tuesday prior to the scheduled election.

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