

City ponders 2-year terms vs. 4-year terms

The City of Lake Ozark is considering moving from two-year to four-year terms for elected officials.

The final decision would be up to voters, although the board of aldermen must first approve an ordinance placing the issue on the ballot. That will be an agenda item at a future meeting.

Voters in 2008 soundly rejected the idea of expanding the terms of elected officials, but the city was in the midst of considerable turmoil at the time as the city was beginning to transition into a viable retail and economic development partner at the lake.

Since then, officials note, city government has become much more stable and is considered a respected community as the lake continues to grow.

"At the end of the day, let's not forget the city didn't have the resources then that it does today," one alderman noted.

Operating a city has become far more complicated today with increased government regulations, a larger population and more businesses. As the city has grown in the last dozen years, city officials have taken a more proactive role in making sure the city's infrastructure is safe, efficient and in compliance with state and federal regulations.

"It took me two years to figure out how city government works," Alderman Dennis Klautzer said. "Had I not been re-elected, my first two years would have basically been for nothing other than serve my constituents. In my second two years, I felt I could contribute more because I knew the system. It's definitely a learning process."

Alderman agreed that four-year terms might give elected officials more opportunity to learn the ins-and-outs of city government but better serve their constituents.

Alderman Mark Maples, who served as Lake Ozark chief of police for several years, said there was considerable turnover among officials during more challenging times for the city.

"The board thought then that the only way to bring a sense of stability to the city was to lengthen terms of aldermen so there wasn't so much turnover," he said. "Every two years the city had significant turnover in key staff positions."

With a stable city government now, and a board of aldermen focused on moving the city forward rather than personal agendas and infighting, officials now feel lengthening the terms of aldermen will be a long-term benefit.

"If you're running every two years, then you're always thinking about re-election," Alderman Larry Giampa offered. "If we have four-year terms, aldermen have time to really concentrate on the city 100 percent and are not thinking about re-election. You're thinking about the city. I think you can accomplish more."

No personal gain

Four-year terms would be staggered just as two-year terms are now. The city is divided equally into three wards with two aldermen representing each ward. Three aldermen are elected every two years, and then three others two years later.

The mayor serves two years as well.

If voters approve the shift to four-year terms, the change would not take place until the next regular municipal election after the issue is approved.

Mayor Gerry Murawski noted that it's often difficult to get people to run for elected positions.

"Maybe four-year terms would incentivize people to run for office if they knew they had time to learn the system and make a difference," he said.