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Healdsburg, CA 95448

DEC 23 2024

December 18, 2024

Healdsburg City Council
City Hall
401 Grove St.
Healdsburg, CA 95448

CITY OF HEALDSBURG

re: district elections

Dear Councilors,

I am writing to urge you in the strongest possible terms not to allow Healdsburg to be blackmailed into making a questionable major change to the city's governance by a publicity- and fee-seeking attorney who has no connection to the city. The issue raised by the attorney – under-representation of the city's large Hispanic community on the City Council – is genuine and important, but the approach into which the attorney is apparently attempting to railroad the city has severe and unfixable drawbacks, which other well-tested ones do not. Please consider better alternatives before proceeding further.

I offer the following grounds for rejecting the proposal for district elections as a remedy to the above issue.

* Courts have repeatedly found that electoral districts must be reasonably shaped and contiguous. Based on my 12 years as a City resident and homeowner, I believe the city's Hispanics are not concentrated geographically in a way that can meet that criterion; drawing such districts will not be possible.

* Districts lock in preferential treatment of one particular group permanently. Districts that give Hispanics greater voice as a group will hinder other under-represented populations that deserve a voice on the council from time to time, such as renters, seniors, and/or persons employed locally. In particular, while ethnicity has particular legal standing as an equity criterion, so does age: Healdsburg has an exceptionally high proportion of older residents, but I believe does not have a history of proportionate representation of them on the Council.

* Unless the City espouses ethnic segregation as a permanently fixed condition, the geographical distribution of Hispanic voters is likely to change over time. Districts will need to be redrawn at irregular intervals in order for this "remedy" to continue to work.

There is a better alternative. Ranked-choice voting systems such as STV (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_transferable_vote) achieve better outcomes, do not lock the voting method to a single discriminant such as ethnicity, and have been proven to work in other jurisdictions. By my reading of the attorney's filing, the law that the attorney is using as a cudgel does not mandate district elections, only elections that provide equitable opportunities for minority representation. STV and other ranked-choice systems accomplish this goal without the drawbacks of district elections. So

please rescind your premature endorsement of district elections, and choose a system that has been proven to work better.

Whether or not you do this, I ask that you provide the following:

- * Copies of any public records that you created or received in connection with responding to the attorney's demand for changes in the City's election.
- * Copies of any communications between the Council and the City Attorney, other than those identified at the time of creation as subject to client/attorney privilege, in connection with the same.
- * Transcripts of any public hearings, or of City meetings subject to the Public Records Act and/or the Brown Act, in connection with the same.
- * To the extent not covered by the above, any public statements by the Council and/or individual Councilors regarding alternative voting methods such as STV that would address the issues raised by the petitioning attorney.

For any individual materials responding to the above that are available to the public through the City's Web site and will continue to be so available for at least 5 years, a Web URL will be an adequate response. For all other materials, please provide either a hard copy mailed to the address above, or an electronic copy in PDF, PNG, or JPEG format e-mailed to [REDACTED]

I request that this letter, and your response, become part of the public record available to the public through the City's Web site.

Sincerely,



L Peter Deutsch