



July 16, 2020

The Honorable Robert "Bobby" Dyer  
and City Council Members  
City of Virginia Beach

RE: Proposed Voter Referenda

Dear Mayor Dyer and members of City Council:

Distributed at City Council's meeting by Council member Jessica Abbott on Tuesday, July 14 was a resolution to place a voter referendum on the ballot in November that could significantly change the way citizens of Virginia Beach elect their Council representatives. While this issue has been raised numerous times over many years, there has been no public review, citizen input or objective study done on behalf of the city and the voters to assess the many representative options, their strengths and deficits or their suitability for the structure and culture of the City of Virginia Beach.

On behalf of Virginia Beach Vision and its 120 business and community leaders, we ask that any voter referendum on this issue be deferred until appropriate study and citizen input can be facilitated.

This is not a simple issue and as stated by several Council Members during the discussion, many voters are confused by the current election process. Without an understanding of the present system, how can we expect voters to determine if indeed it needs change and what that change should look like?

In past months Council has emphasized a desire to be more transparent, to better inform and engage the voters in important decisions, to hold public information meetings and public hearings. This is most certainly a decision of great consequence that deserves thorough vetting and a broad understanding before we call for a voter referendum. It is also not a choice A or choice B issue. There are numerous alternative formats that can be adopted for local elections including: 1) all at-large seats and no districts; 2) all district seats and district only voting; 3) a mix of partial district and at-large seats with district votes only for district seats; or, 4) our current system of at-large voting for both at-large and districts seats.

The significance of this proposed City Council election restructuring demands sufficient objective study, public information forums and citizen input that cannot be accomplished before the November elections particularly at a time when citizen focus is on the national elections and when public meetings are severely restricted by the Coronavirus.

For these reasons, Virginia Beach Vision asks you to defer further consideration of such a voter referendum on the November ballot. Let us make sure our citizens are well informed before we ask them to make such a consequential decision.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Crenshaw".

Ann Crenshaw  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha McClees".

Martha McClees  
Executive Director