

JAN 5, 2024 MGTf TESTIMONY

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To elect, or not to elect, that is the question. Better to have an elected council directly accountable to voters, or an appointed council that can concentrate on long range planning while at arm's length from today's issues? I'm asking you to take the long view.

Some questions: How did people living here 130 years ago have the foresight to keep the shorelines of city lakes public? Would an elected Council make such a decision in today's complex world?

And who does an elected council represent, really? Only 24.5% of the voting-age population participated in the recent Minneapolis election. Who will speak for the other three quarters? Many are low-income, transit-dependent, in survival mode, and just don't have time to vote.

So, why not have an all-elected council, where voters would know who is representing them, and could replace them at will?

Because, let's not kid ourselves: most voters don't want to inconvenience themselves for the benefit of people living here in the distant future. How's the fight going against global warming?

Because, elections don't always reflect the will of the people. Portland, Oregon is a very transit-friendly place, but people elected to their Metro

Council are routinely anti-transit according to its chair. People who own cars generally don't use transit, don't understand transit, don't want to pay for transit. (But they will contribute to your election fund.)

Because, council elections will always be down-ballot, low participation affairs, vulnerable to highjacking by small groups. Members of the White Bear Lake city council were voted out after they supported a BRT line. After all, **the goal is to increase public accountability, not to give small groups the power to block a greater good such as an efficient multimodal transit system.**

So, I can think of two ways to solve these problems:

Option 1. Create a hybrid council with both elected and appointed members. For every two elected members, a group of officials from the same area could appoint a trusted community figure to focus on long-range planning.

Option 2. Keep the council appointed but ask a panel of local elected officials to make the appointments instead of the governor.

More accountability, because local officials are tuned in to their constituents, who do know their phone numbers. Better long-term results, because council members could focus on planning rather than re-election. This is Rep. Koznick's plan, and it has the important advantage that **it can get bipartisan support.** A bipartisan Council would help the people in greater Minnesota think of the metro area as theirs, too. Let's go for what we can get done in a bipartisan way.