

MIAMI BEACH

COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

FROM: City Clerk Rafael E. Granado
City Attorney Ricardo J. Dopico

DATE: July 24, 2024

TITLE: DISCUSS WHETHER THE CITY CHARTER SHOULD BE AMENDED TO PROVIDE FOR EVEN-YEAR ELECTIONS.

ANALYSIS

On March 13, 2024, and at the request of Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez, the City Commission referred a discussion to the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee and the Ad Hoc Advisory Charter Review and Revision Board regarding potential amendments to the City Charter to facilitate even-year elections. See the Commission Memorandum attached as Exhibit 1 – Item C4 S / March 13, 2024.

The proposal stems from concerns by Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez about low voter turnout during odd-numbered years, particularly during local elections for the Mayor and Commissioners. Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez notes that turnout often falls below 20% of the electorate, resulting in elected officials being chosen by a minority of eligible voters. In contrast, she states that even-numbered years elections typically have a significantly higher voter turnout, often double that of odd-numbered years.

Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez has suggested exploring the possibility of amending the City Charter to allow for even-year elections, aiming to encourage greater participation from the City's electorate. To initiate this process, she proposes to submit a non-binding, straw ballot question to the voters, seeking their input on whether the City should formally pursue such amendments. Final approval of any required Charter changes would be subject to voter approval in a subsequent Citywide referendum.

Even-Numbered Year Elections

The Office of the City Clerk consulted with the Supervisor of Elections, Christina White, regarding Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez's proposal to align Miami Beach's General and Run-Off Elections with even-numbered years. Below are the responses provided by Christina White to the questions posed:

Question: Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez has expressed interest in exploring the possibility of aligning our municipal elections with even-numbered years. Is there flexibility in determining the timing of these elections?

Response: If the City decides to shift to even-year elections, it must coincide with the August and November dates set by Florida Statute for regularly scheduled Countywide elections. Candidate qualifying deadlines would also need alignment with statutory requirements, allowing no flexibility in election timing.

Question: Would transitioning to even-numbered years for municipal elections lead to significant cost savings for the City?

Response: Transitioning to standalone even-year elections would not result in cost savings, as the City bears all expenses associated with conducting its election. However, piggybacking on the County calendar (August/November dates) could lead to savings.

Question: What insights or recommendations do you have regarding the potential benefits or hindrances associated with such a change?

Response: Consolidating onto a Countywide election would increase voter participation, reduce costs for the City, and entail oversight and certification by the County Canvassing Board. The Supervisor of Elections would handle all election matters, excluding candidate-related responsibilities of the Office of the City Clerk.

Attached as Exhibit 2 are Supervisor White's full responses to these questions posed.

Charter Review Board

At the March 4, 2024, Ad Hoc Advisory Charter Review and Revision Board (Charter Review Board) meeting, Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez addressed the proposed shifting of the City's odd-numbered year elections for Mayor and Commissioners to even-numbered years.

After deliberations, the Board decided against recommending this change and instead opted to retain the City's odd-numbered year elections but recommended that the City accommodate the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections' request to reschedule its election dates in odd-numbered years to allow for at least four weeks between the General and Run-Off Elections. Supervisor White has requested the three cities that currently share the odd-numbered November General Election/Run-Off schedule (Miami Beach, Miami, and Hialeah) to adopt this change.

As explained by Supervisor White during her appearance before the Charter Review Board on January 9, 2024, and again in Supervisor White's letter of April 23, 2024, the current two-week turnaround between the General Election and Run-Off Election was designed for a time when elections were conducted exclusively on Election Day with no Early Voting or Vote-by-Mail. Now that elections include Early Voting, Vote-by-Mail, and significant post-election requirements, a two-week turnaround creates a significant burden on all parties. Attached as Exhibit 3 is the formal request from Christina White, Supervisor of Elections, requesting the change in date for odd-numbered year elections.

Following her April 23, 2024 letter, Supervisor of Elections White informed the City Clerk of her willingness to accept two possible adjustments to the City's odd-year election schedule:

- Option 1 - Schedule municipal elections in an October/November cycle, where the General and Run-Off Elections are spaced four weeks apart; or
- Option 2 – Schedule municipal elections in a November/December cycle, with the General and Run-Off Elections spaced five weeks apart. See Exhibit 4 - LTC 194-2024 Proposed Adjustments to Odd-Numbered Election Schedule.

Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee

On May 22, 2024, the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee ("PSNQLC") heard and concluded the item. The Item was transmitted to the City Commission with an unfavorable recommendation by a vote of 2-2. Commissioner Suarez and Commissioner Magazine were not supportive of the proposal to transition elections to even-numbered years.

Vice-Mayor Dominguez voted in favor of the proposal to allow the City Commission to discuss the matter.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

N/A

CONCLUSION

A request is hereby made for the City Commission to discuss the proposal regarding potential amendments to the City Charter aimed at facilitating even-year elections.

Several different options have been proposed concerning changing the City’s election dates: the Charter Review Board recommended an October/November cycle in odd-numbered years; Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez is recommending August/November in even-numbered years; and—if the City retains odd-year elections—the Supervisor of Elections is recommending either October/November or November/December. To avoid voter confusion in the November 4, 2024 election, the City Attorney and City Clerk recommend submitting no more than **one** measure to the voters that pertains to election dates.

Applicable Area

Citywide

Is this a “Residents Right to Know” item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?

No

Is this item related to a G.O. Bond Project?

No

Was this Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481, includes a principal engaged in lobbying? No

If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s):

Department

City Clerk

Sponsor(s)

Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez

Co-sponsor(s)