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Another Voice: Vote no on Measure 14-67: Protect our democratic process

By Megan Saunders Oct 12, 2019

The green signs around town make Measure 14-67 seem simple — it is not. Measure 14-67 would change the City Charter (the constitution for the City of Hood River) to require a vote before leasing or selling park land. While we all value parks, changing the City Charter changes our democratic system and should not be done lightly.

We have a local democratic process that works:



1. The community elects councilors to represent their views. Those representatives work hard, listen to their community, and balance the needs of all people. If the community feels a representative is no longer working in their best interest, that representative is replaced. If the community feels someone else better represents their views, that new person is elected.

Representatives live and work locally. They are accessible at the grocery store, in the coffee shop, on the sidewalk, and at community events.

2. Local representatives make decisions through open public processes. Few decisions are made at a single meeting. Large community decisions often take months or years in the public process. The community's voices are heard through open houses, public hearings and other public meetings, as well as through emails, letters and phone calls. In a functioning democracy, the end result of these public processes is often a compromise that everyone is a little unhappy with, but that best serves the majority of the community.



3. There is an extensive appeals process available to community members that has been used on many local issues over the years.

These processes ensure strong and ongoing feedback between the community and their elected representatives, ensuring the community's voices are heard. They provide the checks and balances on elected representatives to ensure they continue to work in the community's best interests.



A strong democracy requires solid processes and healthy community participation. Hood River has both. This system has created the community we all love. Our democratic system is strong enough to continue to improve the community into the future. Changing our democratic process over a single policy issue undermines the integrity of our democracy.

Elected representatives need to balance the needs of the entire community within the limited resources available. Hood River's representatives manage all city assets, including drinking water, transportation, sewer and stormwater, public safety, public lands (including parks) and more. Good management of all of these functions is important to the health, safety, and happiness of city residents. Why would we change our City Charter to remove the ability for elected representatives to manage just one portion of those city functions? If our system does not work for all of these city functions, we as a community need to address much bigger issues than just removing the ability of elected representatives to manage park land.

Changes to the City Charter are forever. They often have unintended consequences because we can't know what a future community will need or want. Removing the ability of elected representatives to manage one portion of our city's functions limits their ability to enact the views and direction of their community.

Measure 14-67's proposed change to the City Charter creates a significant and costly obstacle for a small subset of community decisions. An additional vote beyond our current democratic processes will cost the community money and time. It will also cost the community in lost opportunity, as the uncertainty of such an effort (and the time and financial burden) will mean that decisions potentially covered by this Charter Amendment will be removed from the community discussion prematurely, potentially removing some of the best solutions to community problems from the table.

In addition, this Charter Amendment would make it hard for elected representatives to take advantage of new opportunities, as even without the proposed new hurdles, local governments struggle to move quickly. All of this means the ability of elected representatives to be creative and flexible over time, and to be responsive to their community over time, will be limited.

Please think long and hard about any changes to the City Charter. Our local democracy works. Our democratic institutions are more important than any single policy decision. Vote NO on Measure 14-67.

Megan Saunders is a member of Hood River City Council.