



September 15, 2011

Committee Members
2012 Charter Revision Committee
Austin City Hall
301 West 2nd St.
Austin, TX 78701

RE: ANC Executive Committee's Initial Statement on Geographic Representation on Austin City Council

Dear Committee Members:

The executive committee of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC) is pleased to submit to you the following initial statement on the issue of single member districts for the City of Austin.

“The function of any elected representative is to gauge the political will of the people, to mediate differences among constituencies to form fair and effective public policy, and to ensure that the bureaucracy carries out that policy. In city government, effective representation ranges from determining why a pothole hasn't been repaired to setting long-range priorities for citywide infrastructure improvements. Over the past 10 years, as members of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC) have participated in the city's neighborhood and comprehensive planning efforts, it has become clear that the roles of our city council and city administration have been reversed. The task of gauging the political will of the people has fallen increasingly to city staff, and citizens find that they must negotiate the terms of public policy directly with staff. At the end of the process, city staff presents recommendations to City Council, and there is little opportunity for citizens to communicate directly with an elected representative.

Several years ago, the ANC identified Austin's at-large election system as a significant factor in this disconnect. Because our at-large city council members each represent the entire population (almost 800,000 people), none of them can provide effective constituent services. Austin is the largest city in the United States without district representation. If truly representative and participatory, such election systems ensure that district voters' interests are represented and that each district has equal weight on the council. The cost savings of running district election campaigns (versus citywide campaigns) would foster more grassroots candidates and participation, which in turn makes the electoral process more competitive and increases voter turnout. Geographic districts are not a panacea for all that ails our city; however, they do promise a substantial improvement.



To that end, the ANC supports geographic representation on Austin's City Council. The ANC membership is currently reviewing proposals for a new election system with either six, eight, or 10 districts. The ANC will have specific recommendations and we will submit them as promptly as our internal process allows."

Today's statement represents an initial outline of ANC's position. The ANC will make specific recommendations to the Charter Revision Committee as promptly as our internal process permits. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve R Aleman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven Aleman
ANC President, 2010 – 2011

cc: ANC Executive Committee
City of Austin City Clerk