

Reinstate Three-Year Local Government Terms Of Office

WHEREAS: Three-year terms allow greater accountability to voters, who are able to show, through, elections, their regard for the directions their local governments are taking, and;

WHEREAS: Four-year terms are an onerous commitment for many, and more likely to make potential candidates willing to stand for election hesitant to do so; and

THEREFORE: Be it resolved that the provincial government reinstate three-year local government terms of office.

Background

B.C. has a history of changing the municipal election cycles. Prior to 1986, there were two-year terms and prior to that one-year terms.

UBCM Resolutions:

1986 vote to extend term to three years, and a provision for local autonomy be provided that would allow annual elections if the affected electors so decided – endorsed.

1990 – first three-year election term

2003 – vote for a choice of either three-year terms or staggered two-year terms – defeated

2006 – vote for four-year terms – defeated

2007 – vote for four-year terms – endorsed

2010 – vote for four-year terms – defeated

2013 – vote for four-year terms – endorsed

2014 – first four-year election term

In 2010 UBCM (Union of British Columbia Municipalities) did not endorse a resolution to move to a four-year term of office and the provincial government agreed not to change the term of office.

Subsequently in 2013 UBCM members narrowly approved extending the term to four years, and within six months, without any public input, the province announced that the 2014 election would be the beginning of a four-year term.

A main justification for moving to a four-year term was the argument to bring municipal election terms in line with the fixed four-year election cycles of senior governments. However, events have shown that the fixed four-year elections for provincial and federal governments are often not adhered to.

2018 a resolution to AVICC sponsored by Metchosin “To Rescind Four-Year Local Government Term” was not endorsed.

We are now nearing the end of the second cycle of four-year terms. There has been more time to evaluate pros and cons, and it is appropriate to again examine the issue. The original reasoning for moving from three to four-year terms has been shown to be invalid.

Incumbent Councillors, out of convenience, would probably prefer longer terms between campaigns. This should not be a consideration. What is more important is that voters have more frequent chances to exercise their democratic right, and to judge how they feel elected officials are representing their citizens.

For potential candidates considering running, a three-year commitment is much less daunting than a four-year term. And for incumbents pondering whether or not to run again, the same can be said.

If one or two-year terms were too short to be effective, four-year terms have proven in many cases to be too long to optimize good governance. More and more we seem to see examples of dysfunctional Councils, which harm their communities. A three-year term allows the electorate an earlier chance to reaffirm good Councils or to make changes to bad situations.

To quote from an editorial in the Victoria Times Colonist newspaper on December 15, 2020: "...the move for four-year teams for municipal councillors was a massive mistake. It is simply too long. The provincial government should revisit the decision soon, and give municipalities across the province a more effective system before the scheduled 2022 vote. Four-year terms were a bad idea. Let's fix it."