

This fall we are facing yet another charter change initiative.

You've got to admire the sheer determination of the charter change people. They are determined to get a different charter, of any sort, if only it rids them of the detested commission form of government.

Many of them are friends of mine, and people I respect. Indeed people like Gordon Boyd, Pat Kane, and Bob Turner would make excellent council members under the current charter, and I wish they would choose to work within the system.

I'm not going to rehash the old arguments about pros and cons of different forms of city government. We've been through that many times. But I'd like to address the new wrinkle in the charter change proposal, the introduction of a ward system.

Where did this idea come from? I think I've figured it out.

If a city manager is hired, elected members of the council would have nothing to do—their old jobs would be taken from them by someone unfamiliar with Saratoga Springs but armed with the three semesters of graduate school training in city management that supposedly make them uniquely qualified to run the City of Saratoga Springs. But what do we do then with these elected officials who now have nothing to do?

Under the commission form of government all Council members are elected at large and represent the entire city. Various neighborhood associations, some more active than others, represent particularly parts of the city and lobby on behalf of their neighborhoods.

With the city manager in place, and with council members now representing only parts of the city, the council can be kept busy with neighborhood squabbles, leaving the city manager free to run the city without interference, as he sees fit.

(And I use the pronoun "he" advisedly because almost all of them are men. Though in the past charter change advocates have made the argument that charter change was essential in order to bring more women into government! You won't hear that one this time around now that the majority of council members are women.)

It's a brilliant solution to this built-in new problem. But it's also condescending, cynical, manipulative, and disrespectful of city residents. The new wrinkle of a ward system is a REALLY bad idea, and makes this the worst charter change proposal we have ever seen by far. The voters can and should reject it—yet again.

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