

After Last Week's Miserably Low 21% Electorate Turnout, Newton's Dysfunctional Election Process Should Embrace Change As Proposed by the Petitioners

Councilpersons Flynn, LeFrois, Diglio and Elvidge Should Respect the Public's Demand

Last week, only 21% of the electorate turned out for Newton's election. Only 10%, or less, of the electorate elected Newton's three next councilpersons. It is ever more obvious, and imperative, that this democratic process be improved. Yet on May 14, Newton's Council dithered and would not respect the public with a decision.

Submitted to Newton's Mayor and Town Council, on April 18, was a Faulkner Act Petition that requests the municipal election to be moved to November. This will increase voter participation, reduce special interest influence and save money. The petition received overwhelming support and in a short 11 days, over 400 signatures were obtained (150% of what was needed). Yet lawyers and politicians, credentialed or novices, continue to pretend to know better than the public. For weeks they have incredibly recommended that a costly special election be held without respecting that the public signed for a more common sense, respectful referendum schedule.

The Petitioners and signees sensibly waived their right to a special election when a general election date was stated. If the Town Council wants to change our Petition, and unnecessarily increase costs through a special election, they should first discuss this with the Petitioners. For the Council is allowed to negotiate with the Petitioners - and we will give them permission to overrule their lawyer's costly, self serving litigation path. However, if the Council and Mayor foolishly wish to embrace their lawyer's opinion, and unilaterally change the petition, we look forward to their legal filing before a Judge, for it is the Judge that is the impartial party who should authorize their mistake.

To unilaterally change the public's sensible Faulkner Act Petition (which responsibly directs that a referendum take place on the better attended, no-cost general election date) requires a Judge's approval. We will then have to consider how to respond to the Council's unnecessary litigation for a special election. However, there is no reason for the Council to take this path - ***just ask permission of the Petitioners who represent the public. We will negotiate with sensibility.***

To make it clear to all the readers, here are the opposing positions on this issue raised on May 14 during Town council meeting:

The Petitioners propose two possible actions for the election process:

- a) Town Council itself changes the election date to coincide with general election, or*
- b) the Town Council puts the question as a referendum on the November general-election ballot (no extra cost)*

The Town Council has spitefully offered only two possible actions:

- a) petitioners withdraw the petition, or*
- b) Town Council schedules a costly, special election to determine whether to consolidate town council voting with the general election*

The New Jersey Supreme Court calls this Petitioner's challenge to the Council a "crucible of the democratic process". If we cannot reach an agreement, the matter should be settled by a judge and not through Council hubris.

In the meantime, let's not lose sight of why this Petition was necessary. Newton has had 8 years to make the election date change that many other towns have done. Moving the election date to November brings a larger, more representative turnout. And this turnout reduces the influence of special interests and the advantages of a do-nothing incumbency. Empowering the voters is what a governing democracy should want to achieve.

Additionally the petty, weak argument of insiders, incumbents and the establishment is that moving the election to November removes a non-partisan election process. This is wrong and "False News". Nearby Vernon, Byram and Sparta have long ago moved the Faulkner election date. Their elections remain non-partisan. There, a party-line vote is still not allowed.

It is time that Newton move forward. It's been years of voter turnout suppression that feeds special interests. We are a democracy - let us create a level playing field and vote on a day when voter turnout is largest.

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Find out more on Facebook by searching "[Petition to move Newton's Municipal Election to November](#)"

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