

HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Best if local government closer to the people, neighborhoods

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An Oct. 10 letter about the Edison referendum on a ward system contained a great deal of misinformation. I respect those in favor of or against the ward system, but their statements should be based on fact and not fiction. Here are the facts.

The writer first and foremost opposes the ward system for Edison because she states it will lead to greater costs and property taxes, citing competition between districts. Since when is competition bad? Competition leads to the best product at the best price or, in this case, the best government closer to the people and with checks and balances.

Each ward council member cannot unilaterally get his wish list. He still has to have the votes of at least four other council members to have the project move forward. There will always have to be open discussion, compromise and checks and balances.

As far as property taxes, the ward system will have no effect one way or the other. Property taxes are determined solely by a budget proposed by the mayor and ultimately with consent of the council. If the mayor's budget contains a huge tax increase, as it has over the last two years, yes, there will be a tax increase. It was the council and the finance committee who pared the tax increase last year to 7.5 percent, rather than 18 percent.

There are very little or no transition costs for the change to the ward system. First, there are no special elections as stated by the writer. All elections will occur during the normal primary and general elections. There are no separate elections required and, therefore, no additional costs. There is no additional salary and/or support staff needed for the two additional council members. There is no additional money needed for the council because the council has voted to split the \$42,500 total combined salary of the present seven council members between nine members.

There is no additional cost for determining the five ward districts. The members of the county Board of Elections, two Republicans and two Democrats, together with the municipal clerk constitute the ward commissioners. The county and township are already paying the salaries for these five individuals. Determining the wards is a function of their jobs under New Jersey law. No additional salary will be paid.

The ward system will bring the government closer to the people by having each section of town fairly represented. Edison has become unmanageable with more than 100,000 residents. No matter how hard our present council people work, they can never know every section of town or the specific problems or needs of each. It is only a council person who lives there, shops there and drives through the area on a daily basis who is truly familiar with it. It is such a council representative who has the pulse of the neighborhood and can see potential problems before they arise and bring it to the attention of the rest of the council.

Yes, we do have 78 districts in Edison with Democratic and Republican representatives. Yes, if they were all out there doing their jobs, it would be fine. But, unfortunately, that is not the case. Also, it should be noted that each represents a political party, not the people. The writer states the best way to enhance our neighborhoods is to have true neighborhood representation. That's absolutely correct and that is exactly what the ward system does. We need a change. We need the ward system.

Lois Wolke

EDISON