

# HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

**ELECTION 2007**

## Time for Edison to adopt ward system

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As towns grow, they also grow up. And just like people, their needs change. Edison is at that point now. It has matured beyond a homogenized, one-size-government-fits-all municipality. At 100,000 residents strong, all packed into distinct communities with distinct personalities, it is time for the township's municipal government to better reflect its rambling population's diverse and very often specific needs.

Places with names like North and South Edison, or neighborhoods called Nixon, Bonhamtown, Clara Barton, Oak Tree and the Inman Avenue area, each have their own particular strengths and weaknesses, their own successes and challenges. The Clara Barton section has long been talked about as a prime area for economic revitalization, for example. Meantime, the Oak Tree Road area has blossomed into a commercial powerhouse on the strength of its burgeoning population of Asian Indian residents and businesses; its blueprint for the future is a completely different set of plans than the one for the Clara Barton area, or for any of its other counterparts in Edison.

Language, custom and household differences abound, very often scattered geographically from one subset of Edison streets to the next. So do infrastructure, services, parks, industry and the like — the qualities that go beyond mere name to make a neighborhood what it is.

In short, citizens have begun to want, and they deserve, government representatives who not only understand their unique needs but are elected first and foremost to deliver on those desires.

A Nov. 6 ballot question to be decided by Edison voters achieves this exact end. Right now, Edison voters select seven at-large Township Council members. But the change in charter would expand and redefine the elected body to include five ward representatives and four who are elected by the people at large — nine council representatives in all.

The proposal makes sense.

Here are a few reason why:

Sections of town and their concerns would be guaranteed a place at the governing table.

Neighborhood problems would be addressed in speedier fashion.

Voting power would increase.

Finally, the ward system would reduce the number of people a candidate must reach, making campaigns less costly, easing the corrupting influence of political money, and encouraging a larger number of contestants to enter the fray. More choice usually means stronger candidates. And competition and healthy rivalries are one basis for effective and efficient government.

Ward detractors worry the system might inflame regional differences within the township, and in certain cases that might be true. But political logjams are a part and parcel of democracy. Compromise usually works them out. When it doesn't, voters need to respond. The best place is at the ballot box, where they can get rid of council people who just can't get along and are roadblocks to action.

The last time a ward system was considered by Edison's electorate, in 2003, the measure failed by a slim 29 votes: 6,626 against, 6,597 for. Statistically, that's a virtual tie. Here is to the hope the margin will be wider this time — but in favor of the proposal. Edison stands to become a better place to live with a government better tailored to meet its modern-day challenges.