

## **BACKGROUND OF THE LWV DECISION TO OPPOSE PROP D / STRONG MAYOR**

Historically, the San Diego LWV has promoted a city council-city manager form of government as the preferred system for the city of San Diego. Understanding that there is no ideal governance system, we have periodically reexamined our city government position.

Following our most recent update we broadened our position to say: "LWVSD supports a city government with structures and procedures that promote responsive, responsible and efficient government with adequate checks and balances of power, with equal opportunities for citizens and with provisions for citizen participation.

### **Siren Call of the Strong Mayor Form of Governance**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century most major U.S. cities had a strong mayor form of government. In reaction to the "bossism" and political corruption that dominated many eastern and midwestern cities, San Diego reformers in the 1930s prevailed on voters to join other southwestern cities in opting for a city manager governance system. But as time went on, the idea of a strong mayor proved an irresistible siren call to political leaders.

- In 1969, a Citizens' Charter Review Convention under Mayor Frank Curran recommended retention of the city manager system but with greater appointive, legislative, and leadership powers for the mayor (defeated by voters)
- Four years later, a Charter Review Commission under Mayor Pete Wilson recommended a strong mayor system (defeated by voters)
- A 1989 Charter Review Commission under Mayor Maureen O'Connor recommended that the mayor should continue as a member of the City Council but be given veto power over Council actions (subject to a 2/3 Council override). The Commission also recommended that the number of council districts be increased from 8 to 10 (no support from Council).
- Two years later, Mayor O'Connor attempted to create an Elected Charter Commission to strengthen the Mayor's office (also fell by the wayside with no Council support).
- Under Mayor Susan Golding in 1993, a petition drive was initiated to place on the ballot a Charter change establishing a strong mayor system (unsuccessful attempt).
- In 1999 the Committee of 2000, an influential group of business people initially organized to promote the downtown ballpark project, tried to enlist Mayor Golding to lead the charge on their private proposal to bring in a strong mayor form of government (went nowhere).
- Four years later, the same self-appointed group was successful in getting Mayor Dick Murphy to lead the charge to place a strong mayor proposition (Prop. F) on the 2004 ballot. It was approved by the voters in 2004.
- From the start of the campaign to install a "strong mayor" over 10 years ago, the San Diego LWV was a vocal proponent of a Citizens Charter Commission to facilitate an open, inclusive, and responsible public process to improve and reform city government. This action did not materialize.
- On January 1, 2006 under the terms of Prop F, San Diego started a 5-year experiment with a new form of government. To enable the trial switchover from our longstanding city manager system to a strong mayor system, Article XV was inserted into the City Charter.
- Charter section 250 explains the purpose and intent of this trial change: *The City of San Diego has operated under a governance structure known as the City Manager form of government since its current Charter was adopted in 1931. Under the City Manager form of government, the City is governed by a Council consisting of eight members elected by district and a Mayor who is elected citywide. Also under this form of government, the policies, rules, and decisions of the Council are implemented by a city manager. The purpose of this Article is to modify the existing form of governance for a trial period of*

time to test implementation of a new form of governance commonly known as a Strong Mayor form of government.

- Following the enactment of the 5-year "strong mayor" experiment, a citizens committee, chaired by the League of Women Voters, worked alongside a city consultant to help make the transition to a new form of government as successful as possible. It was a politically unstable time – in the midst of the transition year Mayor Murphy resigned from office. Jerry Sanders was elected a few months later to fill the vacancy.
- In 2008, voters agreed to place on the June 2010 ballot a proposal to make the "strong mayor" form of governance permanent, to increase the number of council seats to 9 following the 2010 census, and to increase the requirement for a council override of a mayoral veto to a supermajority of 2/3.
- To take into account the city's economic collapse over the past five years, the San Diego LWV recently proposed an extension of the trial period of the "strong mayor" experiment so voters could have a better chance to evaluate the *system* rather than the *political style* of the present mayor and administration. Voters were not granted this opportunity.

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**Prop D Creates an Unbalanced System between the Mayor and Council  
Prop D Permanently Removes the Mayor From Direct Contact With San Diego Citizens**

<p><u>The city council must listen to the public</u> at regular open meetings and report to the public about special interests, lobbyists, and individuals trying to influence their decisions.</p>	<p><u>The mayor does not meet with the public</u> and is not accountable to the public about who meets with him or his staff.</p>
<p><u>The council stands to lose authority to respond to constituents</u> and be held hostage by the mayor's stronger veto power.</p>	<p><u>The mayor will gain power to override council decisions</u> on budgetary matters and priorities for neighborhoods, communities, and citywide projects.</p>
<p><u>The voice of the community is stifled</u> when city council authority is reduced and locally-elected representatives are sidelined.</p>	<p><u>The influence of special downtown, growth, and development interests gains strength</u> when power is increasingly concentrated at the top.</p>
<p><u>Maintaining adequate checks and balances</u> in a "strong mayor" system requires a strong public voice.</p>	<p><u>San Diego is at a disadvantage</u> since it lacks a tradition of civic engagement by influential and organized ethnic, racial, civic, affordable housing, environmental, political party, and other categories of urban-city activists found in most "strong mayor" cities.</p>

**Bottom Line**

The LWV opposes Prop D because when ordinary citizens permanently lose access to the mayor, accountability becomes a hollow campaign slogan. When the public voice is stifled, checks and balances cease to exist. When our council representatives lose authority to serve the districts they were elected to represent, the democratic process deteriorates.