



***WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held October 1, 2008, with the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).***

*Mayor Davis started the meeting at 7:13 p.m. It was held in the Springhill Lake Recreation Center.*

***PRESENT WERE:*** Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

***STAFF PRESENT WERE:*** Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; David E. Moran, Assistant City Manager; Robert Manzi, City Solicitor; Hank Irving, Director of Recreation; Joe McNeal, Assistant Director of Recreation; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

***ALSO PRESENT WERE:*** Deborah Jeon, Maryland Chapter of the ACLU; June White Dillard, Prince George's County Chapter NAACP; Amy Ngai, Fair Vote and numerous residents.

*Following introductions, Mayor Davis explained this was the third work session the City had scheduled with the NAACP and the ACLU concerning a letter that was sent by both of these parties to the City in regards to the City's election process. The first work session was held in the Municipal Building on June 30, 2008, at which the NAACP and the ACLU were joined by Fair Vote. All three organizations gave presentations, Council members asked questions, and questions and comments were offered by many in attendance. The same format was used for the second work session on August 18, 2008, held in Greenbelt East at the Greenbriar Community Building.*

*Mayor Davis stated the Council has not taken any position on this matter, nor will it take a position tonight. She said this work session is one more opportunity for the Council to listen to all participants and to gather information.*

*Mayor Davis commented there were many differing viewpoints in the room and asked everyone to be respectful and open-minded throughout the evening. She asked that no one applaud, cheer, or offer any other loud response and stated Council was looking forward to a positive and productive discussion. She asked all audience members who wished to speak to sign up and said she would call on speakers after the presentations were complete. She stated everyone would be given a chance to speak, but those who did not speak at the previous meetings on June 30, 2008, and August 18, 2008, would be called first. She asked all speakers to state their name and address for the record when they were called upon.*

*Mayor Davis announced that voting registration was taking place in the rear of the room and there were also forms available for name and address corrections. She reminded the audience that voter registration ends on October 14th at 9:00 p.m.*

### *Presentations*

*Ms. Ngai presented a Power Point Presentation on Choice Voting/Proportional Representation detailing the principles of proportional voting and how choice voting works. She provided sample ballots to audience members asking them to rank their favorite restaurants. Ms. Ngai then explained how the top three restaurants were determined using choice voting.*

*Ms. Dillard stated the NAACP supports a change to single member election districts in Greenbelt. She said that smaller election districts provide an equal opportunity for all candidates to be successful. Ms. Dillard mentioned that the City of Bowie has had minority representation on their Council since they changed from at-large elections to a combination of at-large and election districts several years ago.*

*Ms. Jeon said the ACLU supports the reforms mentioned by both Ms. Ngai and Ms. Dillard but believes reforms work best if part of an overall package. The ACLU recommends a three point approach: 1) Increase voter registration and turnout rate with ACLU assistance, 2) Make the most of the turnout there is by shifting municipal election dates to coincide with state and national elections, and 3) Consider structural reform in order to increase racial fairness. Ms. Jeon said the NAACP and ACLU have offered to work with residents to do more voter outreach.*

*Mayor Davis thanked the NAACP, the ACLU and Fair Vote for their presentations and asked Councilmembers if they had questions.*

*Mr. Roberts asked Ms. Jeon if she could provide examples of increases in voter turnout for other municipalities when their local elections were combined with state and national elections. Ms. Jeon said the voter turnout had increased from 17% to 42% when Richmond, Virginia, changed their local elections to coincide with state and national elections.*

*Ms. Mach asked about the budgetary impact of combining local elections with state and national elections and whether there should be any concern about city votes being lost in county votes. Ms. Jeon said four municipalities in Maryland hold their municipal elections with state and national elections and Hagerstown is now considering this option. Ms. Jeon said the City of Hagerstown City Clerk estimated their city would save approximately \$50,000 if they make this change. Ms. Jeon was unable to provide cost savings or increases experienced by the other Maryland municipalities. She said that since the votes are done on the same election machines, and are presumed to be handled capably, no votes are lost.*

*Mr. Putens asked whether information was available on how much money the successful candidates spent on their campaigns in the Richmond election. He mentioned many candidates run on money from developers and community candidates are often not successful. Ms. Jeon said she didn't have this information available.*

*Mr. Herling asked if it was possible for a candidate who received the fifth highest number of votes to be unsuccessful. Ms. Ngai said this was possible depending on the ranking of the votes. She noted that choice voting enables the candidates who have the broadest level of support in the community to be elected.*

*Mayor Davis then opened the floor to speakers in the audience.*

*Kathleen Norvell, 6104 Breezewood Drive, asked how many minority residents in Greenbelt West were registered voters. Ms. Dillard said she didn't have this information. Ms. Norvell said that she found choice voting extremely complicated.*

*Jim Giese, 20 Maplewood Court, read a prepared statement suggesting a procedure to follow to address the issues of inadequate citizen participation, particularly by minorities, and whether or not the city election process needs to be changed. As to the issue of inadequate citizen participation, he proposed the matter be referred to all appropriate advisory boards and committees, as well as to city staff, for study and recommendations. As to the issue of whether or not to change the election procedures, he proposed asking the citizens of Greenbelt to resolve it and suggested that the Council create a new ad hoc charter review committee on city election procedures. Any proposed changes to city election procedures would be presented to Greenbelt citizens at a regular city election in the form of an advisory referendum question or a charter amendment question without change. Mr. Giese urged the council to officially make the matters raised by the NAACP and ACLU city business and to then ask the citizens of Greenbelt to deal with and resolve them in a typical Greenbelt fashion, deliberatively and openly.*

*Rachel McMullin, 36-F Crescent Road, asked what the cost would be to expand the Council from five to seven members, and if this cost increase could be offset by the cost savings realized if the municipal elections were held in combination with state and national elections. No one could provide an answer. Ms. McMullin said she found choice voting to be difficult to understand and asked if there would be additional presentations to better explain this method of voting. Mayor Davis stated Ms. Ngai has offered to present more public educational workshops.*

*Lowell Owens, 119 Northway, asked how votes were apportioned to other candidates in the case of choice voting and asked who would do the reapportioning of excess votes with the use of electronic voting machines. Ms. Ngai explained there were different ways of doing this such as hand count, optical scan systems, etc.*

*Kathleen Gallagher, 6-C Ridge Road, asked whether the Prince George's County Board of Elections had indicated they were willing to handle municipal elections considering there isn't any funding at this time. Ms. Jeon said that Washington County had agreed to handle elections for Hagerstown. Ms. Gallagher mentioned it may be a different situation in Prince George's County considering the number of municipalities located within the county.*

*Laura Rosenthal, 2-R Gardenway, said many organizations have held voter registrations in Greenbelt West as a result of the work sessions. She said several organizations that normally hold events in the Center are now considering holding their events in Greenbelt West.*

*David Lange, 12 Pinecrest Court, said he came to the work session this evening hoping to hear the process that would lead to closure on this matter. He commended Mr. Giese for his proposal. Mayor Davis said she would discuss the next steps Council plans to take after all the speakers had been heard.*

*Leonie Penney, 127 Northway, said all residents have an equal opportunity to serve on Council and mentioned that many white candidates who had run for Council in the past had been unsuccessful. She mentioned lack of community involvement from residents in Greenbelt West may be due to the transient population and language barriers.*

*Andy Carruthers, 2-M Gardenway, asked how many voters the NAACP and ACLU had registered in Greenbelt during the past eight months. Ms. Dillard said she couldn't provide a definitive answer but mentioned voter registrations had been held three or four times in the area. Mr. Carruthers said he had volunteered to work with the NAACP on voter registration but was never contacted. Mr. Carruthers noted that he had attended all three work sessions with the NAACP, ACLU and Fair Vote and hasn't heard any resident express concern for not being served by their government.*

*Cynthia Newcomer, 4-U Laurel Hill, said that Mr. Carruthers was making the assumption that all residents knew about the work sessions. She mentioned many residents of Empirian Village don't receive the local paper and may not have been aware of the work sessions.*

*Joan Falcão, 114 Julian Court, asked Ms. Dillard if the NAACP had been working on recruiting minority candidates to run for Council. Ms. Dillard said the NAACP works to provide an equal opportunity for all candidates but was not in the business of recruiting candidates.*

*Bill Orleans, Greenbelt, said he does not support municipal elections held at the same time as state and national elections. Mr. Orleans also said he doesn't understand choice voting.*

*Tom Jones, 1-C Woodland Way, recommended candidates should be allowed to place campaign signs on private property in the next election. Mayor Davis said campaign signs have always been allowed on private property but some candidates agree to only place their campaign signs in designated areas.*

*Kelly Ivy, 43 Lakeside Drive, said he had been a candidate for Council twice and wasn't successful in being elected. He noted that he didn't feel that he lost either time because many of the issues on his platform were acted on by the current Council. He said he supported Mr. Giese's recommendation.*

*Mayor Davis thanked Ms. Ngai, Ms. Jeon and Ms. Dillard, everyone who attended the work sessions, those who watched on cable and the 46 residents from all areas of the city who had shared their positions on the issues. She explained that the Council will continue to gather information and research over the next 30 days, will hold several executive work sessions in approximately 45-60 days to discuss the issue and would then publicly state their proposed position and plans. Additional public meetings would then be scheduled.*

*Ms Dillard asked if the record would be kept open for those who couldn't attend. Mayor Davis said yes, and encouraged residents to send letters, e-mails, etc. She emphasized the Council is still gathering information and the discussion is not yet closed.*

*The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Cindy Murray  
City Clerk*