



# MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

## ASSEMBLY MEMORANDUM

No. AM 965-2024

Meeting Date: December 3, 2024

1 **From: Assembly Member Randy Sulte**

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3 **Subject: AN ORDINANCE OF THE ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY**  
4 **TO SUBMIT A BALLOT PROPOSITION AT THE APRIL 1, 2025, REGULAR**  
5 **ELECTION TO QUALIFIED VOTERS OF THE MUNICIPALITY A CHARTER**  
6 **AMENDMENT TO CHANGE THE TERM OF ELECTED OFFICIALS (ASSEMBLY,**  
7 **SCHOOL BOARD, MAYOR, AND ELECTED SERVICE AREA SUPERVISORY**  
8 **BOARDS) TO FOUR-YEARS AND THE QUESTION WHETHER TO HOLD**  
9 **REGULAR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER IN EVEN YEARS ONLY TO**  
10 **ALIGN WITH STATE AND FEDERAL GENERAL ELECTIONS BY AMENDING**  
11 **ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE SECTION 28.20.010, AMENDING CERTAIN**  
12 **PROVISIONS OF THE ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE TO CONFORM TO**  
13 **THIS CHANGE IF APPROVED BY THE VOTERS, AND PROVIDING FOR**  
14 **TRANSITIONAL MEASURES.**

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16 This proposition, if approved, has the potential to reduce election cost by  
17 approximately 50% and increase voter turnout by over 90% as well. It is built around  
18 the simple premise, based on historical data, that if Municipal Elections for  
19 Assembly, Mayor, Services Areas and School Board are aligned with State and  
20 Federal general elections in November we could see a 50% reduction in cost and  
21 an over 90% improvement in voter turnout based on historical State and Federal  
22 results within the Municipality and the simple fact that elections occur only every two  
23 years. The proposed ballot proposition would amend the Charter to change to four-  
24 year terms for the elected positions in the Municipality so elections can be held in  
25 even numbered years only. Establishing the election date is accomplished by  
26 amendment to Anchorage Municipal Code section 28.20.010, which is effective only  
27 if the proposition and Charter amendments are approved by the voters.

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29 The table below, with data obtained from the Municipal Clerk's Office, shows an  
30 average municipal election cost of \$682,640 and a 2024 cost of \$716,374, which  
31 does not include costs that were shared by the regular and runoff election for 2024.  
32 A bi-annual election, theoretically, would reduce this cost in half providing a  
33 ~\$341,319 annual savings.

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**Municipal Election Cost and voter turnout data:**

Year	Registered Voters	Voter Turnout	Turnout (%)	Cost (\$)	Cost per Voter (Turnout)	Cost per registered voters	
2014	210,150	42,344	20.15%	\$ 465,231	\$ 10.99	\$ 2.21	In-Person Voting
2015	206,033	57,606	27.96%	\$ 591,418	\$ 10.27	\$ 2.87	
2016	209,909	51,999	24.77%	\$ 576,120	\$ 11.08	\$ 2.74	
2017	212,782	49,370	23.20%	\$ 454,049	\$ 9.20	\$ 2.13	
<b>Average</b>	<b>209,719</b>	<b>50,330</b>	<b>24.02%</b>	<b>\$ 521,705</b>	<b>\$ 10.38</b>	<b>\$ 2.49</b>	
2018*	218,388	79,295	36.31%	\$ 857,688	\$ 10.82	\$ 3.93	Vote by Mail
2019	227,210	65,100	28.65%	\$ 659,857	\$ 10.14	\$ 2.90	
2020	232,009	71,382	30.77%	\$ 578,275	\$ 8.10	\$ 2.49	
2021*	236,619	75,441	31.88%	\$ 601,005	\$ 7.97	\$ 2.54	
2022	235,882	70,639	29.95%				
2023	235,546	65,853	27.96%				
2024*	237,360	72,250	30.44%	\$ 716,374	\$ 9.92	\$ 3.02	
<b>Average</b>	<b>231,859</b>	<b>71,423</b>	<b>30.85%</b>	<b>\$ 682,640</b>	<b>\$ 9.39</b>	<b>\$ 2.98</b>	

\* Denotes Mayoral election \$ 341,320 estimated annual cost savings by moving to November ballot.

The table below shows average Municipal, State and Federal voter turnout data. Municipal elections average 27.43% voter turnout, while SOA and Federal elections average 52.45% voter turnout. An increase of 25.02% points or over ~90% in turnout; 27.43% to 52.45%. If only the change from Municipal to State elections is considered, the potential increase is 19.51% points or over a ~70% increase: 27.43% to 46.94%.

**Municipal, State and Federal voter turnout data:**

Year	Muni	SOA	Federal	SOA & Federal	Race
2014	20.15%	56%		56%	Governor
2016	24.77%		61%	61%	President
2018*	36.31%	40%		40%	Governor
2020	29.95%		61%	61%	President
2022	25.98%	44%		44%	Governor
2024	30.44%				President
<b>Average</b>	<b>27.43%</b>	<b>46.94%</b>	<b>60.72%</b>	<b>52.45%</b>	
<b>Delta</b>		<b>19.51%</b>	<b>33.29%</b>	<b>25.02%</b>	
<b>Potential Increase</b>		<b>71%</b>	<b>121%</b>	<b>91%</b>	

The challenge, which is almost a matter of preference, is how best to adjust the three-year terms of elected officials of the Municipality to coincide with even election cycles. This ordinance proposes changing them all to four-year terms. It brings up the question whether immediate implementation is desired to change existing terms- which also brings into question ethics issues with members voting on current terms- or to follow a longer process to adjust terms for future elections. The latter negates any ethics question or any appearance of guaranteeing a benefit to currently seated Assembly Members, and is the path in the proposition. This is the same approach mandated by the Charter § 5.08(c) when the Commission on Salaries and Emoluments makes a decision to adjust the compensation of elected officials: such adjustment “shall not affect seated elected officials, but shall affect those elected

1 officials seated after the election following approval of the decision.” While this  
2 avoids the issue, Assembly Counsel has advised that the Ethics Code allows for  
3 Members to vote on election matters that affect themselves per AMC section  
4 1.15.060E.4., *Rule of Necessity*, or subsection .060E.6., *Certification of Election*,  
5 which provides that even if an Assembly Member is a candidate in an upcoming  
6 municipal election, the Member is “not preclude[d from] ... participation in  
7 certification of the municipal election *or other matters relating to conducting a regular  
8 or special election...*” (emphasis added). It is therefore permissible to lengthen  
9 terms as a temporary means to readjust legislative representation on the body,  
10 when done in reasonable manner. The proposed ordinance lengthens terms in the  
11 most reasonable way to transition to four-year terms with elections in even  
12 numbered years only, this way:

- 13 • Assembly seats elected April 1, 2025 will have terms of 3.5 years, next  
14 elected in November 2028.
- 15 • Assembly seats elected April 7, 2026 will have terms of 4.5 years, next  
16 elected in November 2030.
- 17 • The Mayor’s current term that was elected April 2, 2024 and began July 1,  
18 2024 will have a term of 4.5 years, next elected in November 2028 and  
19 eligible to take office January 2, 2029.
- 20 • School Board seats cannot be adjusted until there is a state law change to  
21 its current three-year term requirement. This will be noted in Code so it will  
22 not be overlooked.
- 23 • Service Area board seats would also be extended to 3.5 years for those  
24 elected in April of 2025 and half of those in 2027, to 4.5 years for those  
25 elected in April 2026 and half of those in 2027, to maintain a proportionate  
26 number of staggered terms. However, service area board elections may be  
27 changed by a simple ordinance only, and it may be more reasonable and  
28 efficient to handle their elections differently and separately. This should be  
29 part of the discussion on this proposed ordinance. .  
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31 School Board terms are unique: three-year terms are mandated by State statute AS  
32 14.12.050(a), and all municipalities are preempted from enacting different terms. In  
33 order for this proposed modification to four years to take place, State statute would  
34 need to be modified or no longer apply to Home Rule Charters by modifying AS  
35 14.12.100 removing the applicability of AS 14.12.050(a) to home rule municipalities.  
36 Should this proposition pass the voters, I believe it is prudent to ensure the question  
37 to adjust School Board seats is also asked and approved as a proactive measure.  
38 A note can be included in Charter section 6.02 indicating the change effective upon  
39 the condition that state law is changed. The State has a similar practice in codifying  
40 state law changes that are effective only upon satisfaction of a condition.  
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42 Again, the prize is the ability to nearly double voter turnout and reduce future cost  
43 by approximately 50% saving election funds that are desperately needed in other  
44 areas.  
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46 The path I have proposed is to adjust future Assembly terms, extend the current  
47 Mayoral term, proactively authorize modifying School Board terms when State  
48 Statute allows for terms to be other than three years or the statute does not apply

1 to home rule municipalities, and to adjust Service Area terms through a companion  
2 AO should the proposition be approved by voters in April of 2025.

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4 Another side benefit, and one I am personally looking forward to, is we will not be in  
5 a continual state of election or campaigning leading to voter fatigue. Commercials,  
6 signage, fundraisers, and events ideally would subside to a single period every two  
7 years. To me this is worth the alignment alone.

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9 I encourage you to review the proposition and provide your support to allow the  
10 voters the opportunity to increase voter turnout by nearly 100% and reduce election  
11 costs in half.

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14 **I request your support for the ordinance.**

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16 Reviewed by: Assembly Counsel's Office

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18 Respectfully submitted: Randy Sulte, Assembly Member  
19 District 6, South Anchorage