

Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform Public Statement

Skokie Village Board Meeting

Monday, November 21, 2022

Good evening. My name is Gail Schechter, and I am a Skokie resident and chair of the Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform, a grassroots, nonpartisan ballot initiative committee. In that role, I'd like to offer an overview of the electoral reforms that will be implemented now that the voters have approved all 3 of the binding referendums the Alliance proposed. It's important that we begin from a shared, fact-based understanding of precisely what these referendums are and are not. Mayor Van Dusen, we were pleased to read in the *Skokie Review* your post-election quote that Skokie voters are "seeking change. They have spoken very clearly in what they believe and what they want. We will see to it that the change they want is made." It is in a spirit of cooperation for implementation that the Alliance is here tonight.

1. Nonpartisan Elections

First, Skokie will replace our current partisan elections, in which the established party has a systemic advantage with an earlier filing period and therefore top ballot positioning, with nonpartisan elections, in which all candidates and parties will have the same filing period and the same opportunity for top billing on the ballot. There was talk during the campaign about candidates "hiding" their political affiliations, so I want to clarify that nonpartisan elections will actually increase transparency, by incentivizing candidates to advertise their own merits, positions, and values. They will no longer be listed on the ballot as simply a name on a party slate. This puts the Village Board elections on par with all of Skokie's other elected boards – the library, park district, and school boards – which already have nonpartisan elections.

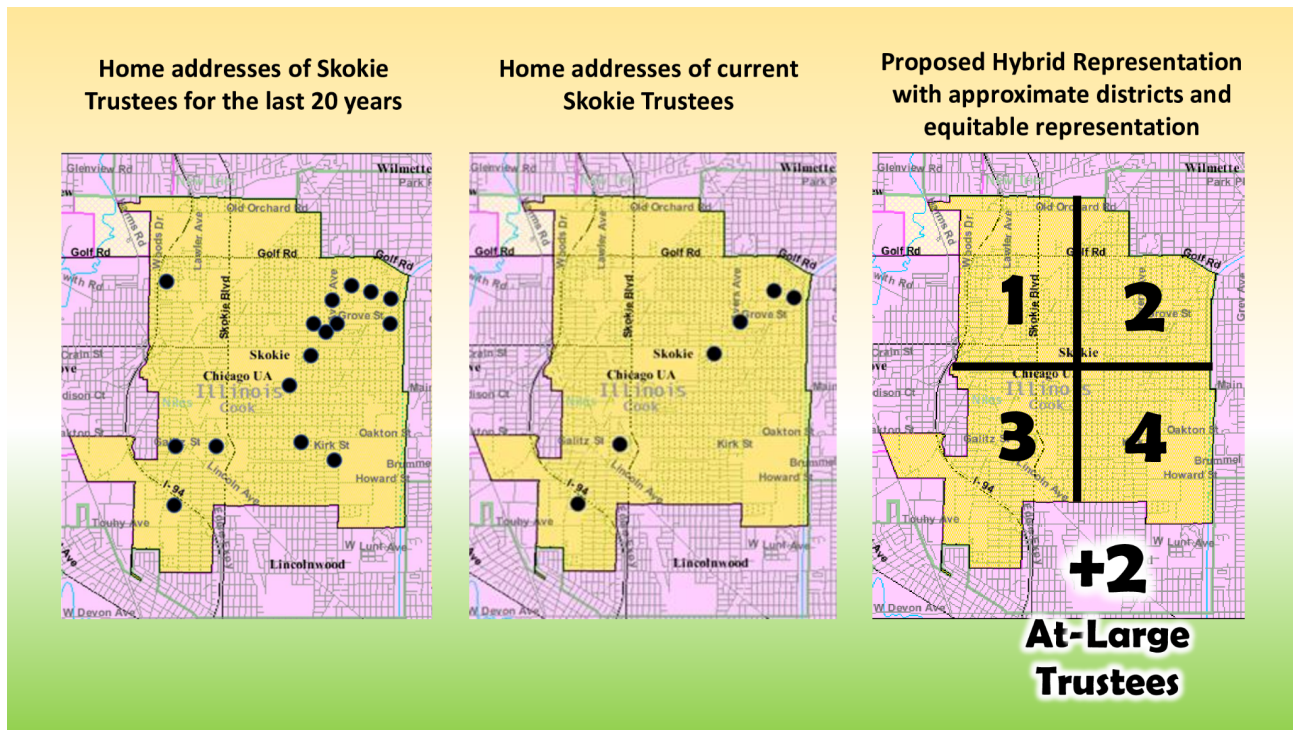
2. Staggered Terms

Second, Skokie will stagger the terms of Village Board members, rather than electing all of our board all at once every 4 years. With this reform, Skokie is simply restoring the system of staggered terms that ended in 1961 due to a now obsolete state law. The people of Skokie never chose to un-stagger our terms, and this reform brings the Village Board into alignment with all the other elected boards in Skokie, which already stagger their terms. There will be no extra elections and no additional cost to taxpayers. All this will do is add a race to an already existing ballot. With staggered terms, candidates will have twice as many opportunities to run for office, voters will have twice as many opportunities to give feedback to the board, and we will ensure that we never lose all

the institutional knowledge on the board at the same time as we could with non-staggered terms. We can thus balance change with stability.

3. Hybrid Representation

With the third referendum for hybrid representation, Skokie will address the inequities of the current all at-large system of representation. Now that Skokie has 68,000 residents, it takes very deep pockets to campaign effectively to the whole Village, thus keeping out people who would otherwise be excellent candidates but just cannot afford it. By drawing 4 districts (and this visual is simply for illustrative purposes, because districts will have to be equal in population), each with about 17,000 people – significantly larger than the whole of Lincolnwood – Skokie will invite the participation of candidates without large campaign coffers. Hybrid representation will also ensure that every quadrant of Skokie will have at least one voice on the board and residents have a dedicated representative. For decades, the majority of this Board has come from a single quadrant of Skokie, which is also the wealthiest and whitest part of Skokie.



To be clear, these 4 districts will be simply electoral districts drawn solely for **representation** purposes, not “wards”. Trustees elected from districts will have no resources or services under their management; there will be no alderperson with a budget to spend from. All resources and services will still be managed village-wide by

the Village Manager. No trustee elected from a district will have the power to make any changes without persuading at least half of the rest of the board to also vote for that change. And with a hybrid system, there will still be two trustees elected at-large, along with the mayor and clerk, combining the best of at-large systems with districted systems and avoiding the extremes of either. There is nothing in this model that suggests that there will be fighting over resources. This model is specifically designed to promote cooperation while ensuring equitable geographic representation.

Good evening, I'm Carrie Bradean, and I am also a Skokie resident and co-chair of the Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform. Now that Gail has clarified what these reforms will actually do, I'd like to comment on how they can best be implemented to ensure fidelity to the intent of these referendums that the voters of Skokie have approved.

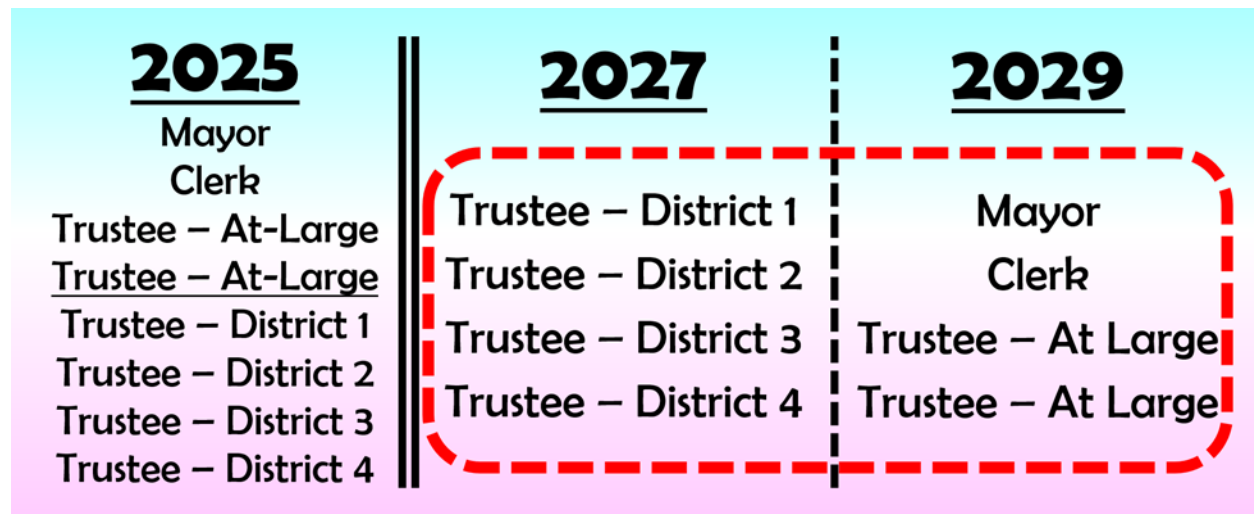
While we appreciate that the Village will hire independent consultants to manage implementation, given your dual identity as leaders of the one party that opposed these referendums and also as the board members tasked with voting on the implementation ordinance, we are concerned about a conflict of interest in implementing the reforms in the spirit in which they were proposed: that of equity, ballot choice, and voter engagement. Therefore, we urge you to please create a transparent, participatory process for districting and implementation.

Implementation Process:

- First, please include the guidance and research of the Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform – the group that designed these reforms based on research into best electoral practices.
- Second, please include the guidance of nonpartisan civic groups that have long standing knowledge and experience in good government, such as the League of Women Voters and the Better Government Association.
- Third, please commit to implementation of these reforms in 2023 to ensure that potential candidates have plenty of time to prepare before the elections in early 2025, and please provide regular updates on your progress toward meeting that goal.
- And finally, please provide frequent, well-advertised opportunities to Skokie residents to provide input throughout the process.

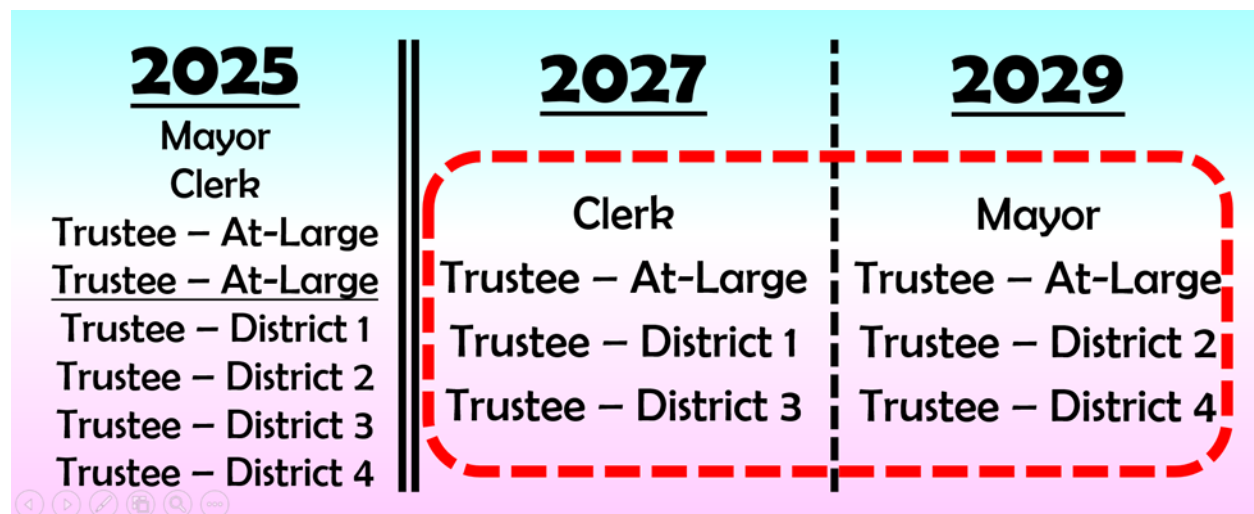
Combining Staggered Terms With Hybrid Representation:

Now let's talk about the specifics of how to combine staggered terms with hybrid representation. We urge you to use this configuration you see here, so that the trustees elected from districts are elected in one election, and the at-large positions – the mayor, clerk, and 2 at-large trustees – are elected in the other. With this configuration, we can encourage the greatest voter turnout at all elections, as the positions that will likely be most motivating to voters to turn out are the mayoral position and the local, district-based trustee position.



In addition, just for one single election, in order to start staggering terms, certain positions will have to be elected to 2-year terms in the 2025 election. We recommend that you make the district-based trustee positions the 2-year terms for that one election, as those positions cost the least to run for, reducing the overall amount of money spent in campaigning.

In this next image, you can see an alternate configuration that we do **not** recommend. If we elect some at-large positions and some district-based positions at the same time, we



might end up giving certain districts an outsized influence on certain at-large positions, because of the likely greater voter turnout in a district when their district-based trustee is on the ballot. For example, you can see in this configuration that, in 2029, the voters in districts 2 and 4 could potentially be overrepresented in the election for mayor.

In conclusion, the Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform is delighted that the voters of Skokie have chosen to reform our outdated electoral system to create a more equitable, transparent electoral system, and we are very excited to see the increased engagement of Skokie residents in our civic community. As the president of the National Civic League said, these reforms “will put Skokie at the forefront of good governance.” We hope that you will also position Skokie as a leader in implementation with a transparent, timely, participatory process as we as a community implement these historic, citizen-led referendums. The Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform offers our research, partnership, and support to the Village Manager to ensure implementation of these reforms that is faithful to their intent and that promotes the greatest candidate and voter turnout and civic engagement. Thank you.

Good evening, my name is Maggie Vandermeer. I'm a Skokie resident and a member of the Skokie Alliance for Electoral Reform Steering Committee.

Districting Best Practices:

Tonight I would like to address in more detail the districting process that the Village Manager will undertake in order to implement the Hybrid Representation referendum. I will be sharing a list of districting best practices put together by Aviva Patt, of the nonpartisan organization, Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization. They are as follows:

1. Districts should be compact and contiguous, of equal population, and comply with federal, state, and local laws.
2. Districts should not be drawn to favor or disfavor any individual or political party.
3. Districts should be drawn to consider communities of interest, which could be racial, ethnic, economic, historical, etc.

4. Districts should be drawn to avoid creation of "orphans" - areas that are physically cut off from the rest of the district by expressways, viaducts, shopping centers, etc. or natural barriers such as rivers with no connecting bridge.
5. Prior to drawing the map, public input should be sought regarding how people define their neighborhood.
6. There should be a public mapping portal or other means for residents to submit their own suggestions for district boundaries.
7. Whether the map is drawn by elected officials, staff, or outside contractors, the process should be open to the public (as viewers, not participants) so everyone is aware of the criteria driving the decisions on where to draw the district lines.
8. Once a map is introduced, there should be at least a month for public comment before it is called for a vote. If changes are made in response to public comment, there should be additional time for the public to respond to the revised map.

We will email these recommendations to the Board and Village Manager, along with the following links to sources used to create them:

[Creating Strong Rules for Drawing Maps](#)

[City Council Redistricting Template](#)

[How Can the Public Engage?](#)

[Redistricting: Background Brief](#)