

January 4, 2024

To: Members of the Metropolitan Governance Task Force

From: Paul Mandell, [REDACTED] Inver Grove Hts., MN 55076

RE: THOUGHTS REGARDING THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Membership and Operations

I had meant to testify at one of your December meetings by changes to my work schedule prevented me from making it at the last minute. I did sit in on much of your January 3 meeting, and that helped me clarify some thoughts, so I am submitting what might be a bit lengthy document for your consideration and would ask that it be entered into the record.

I have recently retired for the second time from my job at the Capitol after over thirty-five years. I have also been involved politically in my free time over the years, both on a partisan level and in many non-partisan and civic areas, including three terms on my local school board. In that time, I have applied more than twice to serve on the Metropolitan Council, both for a member position and on various committees, but never with any success.

While I am undecided about the best way to select Council Members, I do believe that if through elections, no more than half to two-thirds of the members should be directly elected. I am uncertain about how one would run for such a position: as to would there be certain related qualifications beyond just age, For example. As a city and environmental planner, I have always thought iA would be well qualified for such a role, but I wonder if such a position might require at least something more than just interest in service? I would hope that money alone or who one knows would not be allowed to determine winners as so often is the case elsewhere. I f you recommend elections, I would encourage you to consider public financing and spending limits to avoid conflicts of interest.

With that said, I feel very strongly that neither elected or appointed positions should automatically go to current County Board members or City Council members due simply to their office. There is already far too often a general perception that too many of Met Council decisions are internally wired in favor of elected leaders, influential governmental bodies or developers. All too often I hear friends and the public talk about how little they know about what their county board or commissioners do, or complaining about why they have such a large rate of compensation, at least compared to municipal officials. Regarding the latter, I regularly hear complaints about lack of accountability or representation, and I see a correlation between these concerns and the low level of public participation in elections, often hovering below twenty percent of the electorate. I also firmly believe that selecting such public officials could contribute to increased parochialism that could be detrimental to the regional purposes for the Council.

I so apologize if any of what I have said might be taken personally; that was certainly not my intention, but based on concerns should your recommendations reinforce weaknesses of the past or possible misguided directions in the future. I have a real appreciation for the challenging task you have all been charged with- it is both an enormous job and critically important to the health and welfare of both our metro area and the state.

Before closing, allow me to add that one of the most important things you might accomplish would be to dramatically improve the level of both accountability and transparency for the work of the Metropolitan Council, an organization I do fully believe in based on my studies leading to a Master's Degree and experience in other metropolitan areas. For too long, I have rarely met, seen, or heard for past Council members, and might be hard pressed to name more than one from the past twenty years, and I consider myself more involved civically than the average member of the public. The one exception, who had been a former member of the legislature, was often seen participating in public hearings or meetings of not just Council committee meetings, but local city meetings and even a variety of local, non-profit events. I even remember receiving a written update from that Council member during his 2018-22 term.

Given the responsibilities of the Council, I would hope that your work might at least result in greater service by means of communication with the public, not just via posted electronic news on some website but actual outreach to all the public via things like newsletters and or actual town meetings required of all Council members, supported with the necessary infrastructure and funding for such open communication with those there members are supposed to represent..

Thank you for your consideration and for listening. Good luck in your work on this worthy cause.