

A More Responsive Government for Ferndale,

This November we have an opportunity to modernize Ferndale's 1927 charter by updating the organizational structure of our City Government to more closely align with best practices for a city of our size. The charter amendment, if approved, would make the City Manager, an at will employee, the chief operational officer of Ferndale responsible for the day to day operations of the city. This responsibility would be subject to the direction and at the pleasure of Council. The responsibilities of the City Manager would be to carry out the expressed policy decisions of Council and facilitate the City Attorney, City Clerk, Police Chief and Fire Chief in accomplishing their unique missions within the City. Because we have had to reduce the size of municipal government, our employees must work more collaboratively than they ever have in the past if the City is to carry out the tasks expected of it. The City Manager would assume more responsibility for doing those things which he is uniquely qualified to do such as develop budgets, handle human resources issues, communicate with the public and manage City facilities. This will allow the Chiefs, Clerk and Attorney to focus on their core missions and hopefully maintain service levels throughout the City in an era of declining revenues. If the charter amendment passes, it will be clear to our unions and neighboring cities that the City Manager has the authority to negotiate labor issues and cross-jurisdictional service delivery agreements.

It is hard to understand the concerns of the handful of citizens opposed to the City Manager assuming day to day oversight over the appointees who currently report to City Council. The Police and Fire Chiefs will still run their departments, the Clerk and City Attorney will still work as they always have. To date, not a single reasonable, rational or thoughtful explanation has been offered as to why Ferndale can't or shouldn't operate in the same manner as the overwhelming majority of cities in Michigan. Some of the concerns we've heard are that the City Manager would not be as responsive to the needs of the departments as the City Council. Such a claim is ridiculous since the full time City Manager who works 250 days a year will be much more available to the department heads than the City Council that only convenes in regular meetings 24 times a year. Others have expressed concern that the City Manager does not have the specialized skills to manage the departments as though the City Council members do or that Mr. Bruner would advise Chief Collins how to conduct a criminal investigation or direct Chief Sullivan how to attack a fire. Such claims are false, disingenuous and insult the intelligence of the citizens of Ferndale.

Ferndale must change how it operates to survive in the 21st century where municipal resources are limited and the demand for services is high. Ferndale government has long been characterized by department heads who do not communicate with one another or Council and do not coordinate their activities effectively. As municipal revenues have declined sharply in a very short period of time Ferndale can no longer afford the inefficiencies associated with our out of date organizational structure. Delegation of day to day oversight of all city departments to the City Manager is a step towards better municipal governance given the limited resources available to Ferndale.