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To: Mayor Sly James and City Council
From: Betty Ost-Everley
Date: 7/17/2013
Re: City Charter – Proposed Changes

Dear Major James and esteemed members of the Council:

First, thank you for eliciting public comment regarding this issue and taking time to look at all the issues thoughtfully and strategically. It had been my intent to appear before you personally and give public testimony today on the proposed Charter changes, specifically as it relates to council districts, but unfortunately, my schedule will not allow that. Please also note for the record that my testimony is my personal opinion, and not as a representative of the Marlborough Community Coalition, a 501(c)3 organization.

Marlborough is from Gregory Boulevard to 87th Street and the east side of Troost to 71 Highway/Bruce R. Watkins and is 70% African American, 22% Anglo, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 3% "other." Twenty percent of our population lives at poverty or below, and area is 80% rental.

The 80% rental is one factor I want to bring to your attention. We know that our rental population stays in a unit, on average, seven months. They are not putting down roots, they are not participating in neighborhood activities or decisions, and they are certainly not registering to vote and exercising that right. At least in this neighborhood, the combined 77% minority population, over three-quarters of our population, is effecting the outcomes of ballot issues and candidates by not exercising their privilege and power of the ballot box. I believe in many 3rd and 5th District neighborhoods, that is more likely the scenario than what has been presented by other factions seeking to ensure more minority representation on the Council. In those circumstances of high rental populations (and unfortunately, due to housing crisis, I see more of this occurring), I do not believe that a voter registration drive would help the outcomes for the long-term, and slicing and dicing council districts will not solve that issue, either.

In terms of in-district versus at-large representation – I understand that this topic has been or is currently under discussion in various major cities across the nation, so we are not alone in examining it. There are various reasons to look at it, from both a budgetary cost as well as governance excellence and what best serves the people. From my own perspective, our neighborhood has received excellent support, currently and in the past, of many at-large representatives. This was particularly needed in the early years of the Coalition when the

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Marlborough Community Center was threatened with shuttering through a recommendation from a consultant that then City Manager Wayne Cauthen retained to help through a \$87M budget deficit. At that time, Marlborough touched both the 4th and the 6th Districts, and we were able to secure the support of both in-district and at-large council members for not only our home 5th District, but for the 4th and 6th as well. This support was paramount in keeping that center open, and especially so from our at-large representatives. Combined, it represented 50% of the council.

While I am not sure that "three" is the magic number of at-large council members, I do believe that at-large council members help keep a balance when voting for issues that are important to the city as a whole. In my personal observation, there have been several stand-out council members in recent memory, and a great many of them have been at-large. Does being at-large position allow greater latitude to really dive in and understand the people and the issues?

In terms of having 12 districts, I am actually more concerned about this than only three at-large council members. Our area's neighbor to the west, Tower Homes Association, has had consistent issues with being split between districts during the last two redistricting attempts and now is split between three council districts. That is too burdensome for a large neighborhood association to traverse. Additionally, what would be done with allocating PIAC dollars? There has been a constant haggle with ensuring that everyone gets their fair share, however, the very areas that are complaining they don't get appropriate minority representation are some of the same ones that need a shot in the arm that PIAC is oftentimes able to give...and does 12 districts further dilute the pool of money available?

I appreciate the opportunity to submit my thoughts on this subject, and again commend you for taking a long and thoughtful process to this. Certainly, not easy answers, and I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in.

Betty Ost-Everley