



**Bold and Accountable Leadership for Cleveland Heights**

## **Corruption, cronyism, and conflict ... Oh, My!**

By Jeanne Gordon

The August Heights Observer contained a series of Op-Eds written by former members of the Cleveland Heights Charter Review Commission and Cleveland Heights Citizens for Good Government PAC members. These pieces had headlines with words like “risk,” “conflict,” “cronyism” and “politics.”

The authors went in heavy on the scare tactics, regaling readers with examples of directly elected mayors acting badly. They claim the only way to prevent scary outcomes and bad behavior is to rely on city managers and “professionalism.”

The only problem with such contention is that professionalism does not guarantee the absence of corruption or cronyism or conflicts or even politics. We have all read about corrupt professionals - doctors who scam Medicaid, businesspersons who skirt regulations, attorneys who embezzle client funds - professions of all sorts are at risk of having corrupt professionals in their ranks.

In fact, corruption and cronyism can occur among city managers. City manager, Robert Rizzo of California, received a 12 years prison sentence for a \$6 million [corruption scheme](#) that nearly bankrupted the city. Troy, MI City Manager Brian Kischnick was sentenced to 30 months in prison this past January for [bribery and pay to play](#) scheming with city contractors. Opa-locka, Florida’s city manager, two city officials and the mayor’s son were indicted on multiple corruption charges. The new city manager also came under a [cloud of suspicion](#) for corruption and was fired nine months after his tenure began. The Crystal City, Texas city manager was sentenced to 35 years in prison for [fraud, theft, and bribery](#) - a corrupt scheme that also implicated the mayor and most members of council.

Going tit for tat on corruption, cronyism, conflict, risk and politics between a council/manager or mayor/council form of government, however, does nothing to help Cleveland Heights voters decide which form of government is right to move our beloved city forward. Political systems have forever fallen prey to abuse of power, corruption, cronyism and politics. James Madison’s answer to this truism was to incorporate checks and balances into his Constitution in the form of three distinct branches of government - something the council-manager form of government lacks.

Interestingly, while council-manager proponents assert that professionalism provides checks and balances, reduces corruption, and produces better results, Professor Carr determined in 2015, after a review of the research, that the evidence is inconclusive. He did find, however, that [council-manager cities experience lower voter turnout](#). Voters are key in demanding transparency and sunshine, as we have seen right here in this matter.

I believe that a directly elected mayor, with an appointed city administrator, provides for both professionalism and checks and balances. I believe that in a county where 55 of 57 municipalities have directly elected executive mayors, Cleveland Heights is at a disadvantage. I believe a directly elected mayor will do a better job engaging citizens and setting forth a vision by which to be judged.

I can advocate for all I believe and attempt to sway voters to my point of view without turning to the “corruption, conflict, cronyism . . . oh, my” scare tactic. And I can and do trust the residents of Cleveland Heights to determine the manner in which they wish to be governed - and I trust they can determine that without being frightened.

*Jeanne Gordon, a resident of Cleveland Heights, is on the committee for Citizens for an Elected Mayor.*