



Bold and Accountable Leadership for Cleveland Heights

## Elected mayor issue: Separating fact from fiction

By Michael Bennett

Incorrect assumptions, false accusations and – dare I say it? – “alternative facts” – populate political discourse. Let’s clear up misinformation about Citizens for an Elected Mayor (CEM) and the charter initiative on the November ballot:

**The mayor is full-time.** The initiative says the mayor “shall serve the city on a full-time basis” and allows for “limited outside employment” provided such “does not conflict or interfere with carrying out the duties assigned by this charter or general law.” The clause, similar to Lakewood’s charter, provides a limitation on outside employment since none exists in the current charter. Typically, when an item is not addressed, it is permitted. The clause protects against unchecked outside employment.

Council included similar protection in the city’s manager’s restated employment agreement effective Aug. 12. It permits “limited teaching, consulting or other business opportunities with the understanding that such arrangements must neither constitute interference with nor a conflict of interest with her responsibilities under this Agreement.”

**The city’s budget supports a mayor and a city administrator.** The initiative replaces current top administrative positions – city manager and vice manager – with the mayor as an elected executive and a professional city administrator appointed by the mayor and approved by council. Council sets salaries, which currently are \$105,314-\$168,585 for the manager and vice manager \$94,030- \$150,522 for the vice manager, ample to support both new positions.

**The citizens’ initiative is broad-based.** CEM committee members and hundreds of volunteers come from across the city’s neighborhoods. In 23 days, we canvassed locations in every corner of the city and collected 4,000 signatures.

**CEM welcomes any candidate.** CEM’s concern is the best government structure for Cleveland Heights, not a single officeholder. We have not and will not meet with, endorse, discuss or advocate for mayoral candidates. CEM members have agreed not to run for mayor. Choosing the mayor is the job of all voters, not four of seven council members it now takes to choose a (part-time) mayor/president of council and a full-time city manager who reports to council.

**CEM operates in the open.** Our membership has been listed on [www.citizensforanelectedmayor.com](http://www.citizensforanelectedmayor.com) since the site went live in February following our Jan. 17 Secretary of State filing. The website includes the amendment, and other information is added regularly. We held public meetings in February and March at the Lee Road and Noble Road libraries. So far, more than a dozen residents have hosted friends and neighbors in their homes to promote the initiative.

**CEM is a new, grassroots group.** Only two members belonged to a small group that years ago met once with the then-council president to discuss an elected mayor. That group quickly distanced itself from all elected officials. Its efforts ended when council named the Charter Review Commission (CRC). CEM members were catalyzed by the CRC process. Many did not know each other previously.



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CEM thanks the commission for its work. But citizens can disagree with its 11-2 vote (with 2 absences) to retain the structure. Even council disagreed with some CRC recommendations. For example, it substantially revised an ethics provision, decided a vacated council seat could remain open for 150 days instead of 90, and restored “mayor” as a council president title.

Cleveland Heights needs a change in type of leadership. CRC and council see that as a change in the manager’s job from “chief administrative officer” to “chief executive officer” with additional duties.

CEM prefers that the strong executive leader of local government, who will represent us across a region where elected mayors are the overwhelming majority, is a mayor directly elected by and accountable to all the citizens.

*Michael Bennett, a 30-year resident of Cleveland Heights, is secretary of Citizens for an Elected Mayor.*