

Skirting the Democratic Process

The Citizen Advocacy Center is now enrolling individuals for the Citizen Training Corps program. This is a free, hands-on civic skill-training course, which teaches citizens how to practice daily democracy and effectively participate in local government. The program received national attention for teaching participants how to use powerful civic tools such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act.

Vivian Lund, the Mayor of Warrenville, wrote a letter to the editor on August 6, 2000, which illustrates why citizen participation in the democratic process is essential. The Mayor's letter was a plea to Warrenville voters to pass a referendum changing the city clerk position from one that is elected to one that is hired or appointed by the city administrator. The Mayor's letter highlighted three reasons for change: 1. Warrenville citizens may elect a person without the requisite skills, leaving no way to cure the deficiency for four years; 2. The policy change will not affect the public because the city clerk does not influence public policy; and 3. Impartial treatment of elected officials and citizens will be enforced if the clerk is appointed. Each one of these reasons belittles what it means to live in a democracy.

The Mayor's attempt to explain these reasons demonstrates a patronizing attitude toward Warrenville citizens and implies that Warrenville citizens need to be protected from themselves. The concern that citizens will not elect a qualified official implies voters lack the capacity to make an informed decision and reflects an overall distrust of voters.

The Mayor's comment about the policy change having no effect on citizens is moot. Every individual in an administration affects the municipality. This comment negates the fact that we live in a democracy where the government is one of the people by the people and for the people. Centralizing governmental decision making based on the rationale that the public would not be affected usurps citizens' rights to participate in the democratic process. Finally, the Mayor's comment about impartiality is ironic. It is common sense that an elected city clerk is more likely to be impartial than an appointed official, simply because of political loyalties and favors.

It is inappropriate that the Mayor, who is compensated by Warrenville taxpayer dollars, is utilizing public resources such as her official time at city hall and a city hall contact number, to "help with this effort". Furthermore, why is the Mayor the contact person for this citizen initiative rather than an individual from the citizen group circulating the petition? One is left to wonder whether the mayor has a personal ax to grind and is abusing her power to do so.

Citizen Training Corps classes begin September 13, 2000 and meet twice a month for three months. For more information about Citizen Training Corps and how to sign up please call 630-833-4080.

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