

**From:** Steven Leary <Sleary@cityofwinterpark.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 26, 2020 9:01 PM  
**To:** Peter Weldon <peterjweldon@outlook.com>  
**Cc:** Steven Leary <Sleary@cityofwinterpark.org>  
**Subject:** Re: SMD

Fool's Errand: *"A completely absurd, pointless, or useless errand."*

Peter,

I was quoted in the Orlando Sentinel as referring to the effort to divide Winter Park into Single Member Districts as a "Fool's Errand." Given the definition above and the explanation below, I believe you will understand why.

Regarding Single Member Districts (SMDs), a bit of background:

Currently our City Commission is comprised of At-Large representatives. Meaning that each of the five commission members (the 4 Commissioners and Mayor) are elected to represent every single stakeholder in Winter Park. If we move to SMD representation as proposed, we will divide the City into four districts wherein a single Commissioner would represent roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the City's stakeholders and the Mayor would remain as an At-Large representative.

Interesting to note that proponents of SMDs have proposed as many as 8 districts, so we would have up to 9 commission members (8 commissioners and the Mayor). I think you would agree this would be incredibly wasteful and cumbersome. These details should be part of the Referendum language presented to the voters.

The benefits of a SMD system are truly seen in larger geographic, more diverse (environmental, economic, social, commercial, etc....) areas such as Orange County. Rough geographic and population numbers: Orange County is 1,000 square miles with 1,393,000 residents and a +\$1 billion General Fund Budget. Winter Park in comparison is 10 square miles, 30,000 residents and \$60 million General Fund budget.

At the County level an elected representative living east of UCF would most likely not be familiar with the issues in Horizon West. This is why/where an individual dedicated to a particular geographic area would be most effective.

As proposed, the issues with SMDs in Winter Park are as follows:

1. The way it is being brought forward. Items for public referendum are brought forward in two ways, by petition or a decision of the city commission. The petition approach requires roughly 2,000 signatures to add an item to a ballot. To date there has been NO citizen petition effort for this item. Supporters claim COVID-19 does not allow for a petition drive. The efforts by census workers and candidates for the most recent local elections knocking on doors

throughout the pandemic, run counter to this claim. Under previous City Commissions, and as is a traditional practice most everywhere else, if an elected body opts to bring an item forward to referendum, it is usually after much public discussion. In the past few years, we brought forward the Library & Events Center after an appointed task force spent over a year meeting in the public and taking public input before the item was placed on the ballot. As well, last year's Charter Amendments underwent many months of public meetings before being placed on the ballot. SMDs was an issue brought before the Charter Review Task Force at almost every meeting and was continually voted down.

- To date I have received less than 10 emails supporting this initiative (compared to the roughly 150 emails that I received opposing backyard chickens). Additionally, during the 2019 election, Winter Park voters were offered a City Commission candidate who made SMDs a major platform item. This candidate received less than 8% of the vote. This is obviously not an issue that stakeholders feel strongly about.
2. The few proponents of SMDs that have convinced a simple majority of the commission to place the item on the ballot would have you believe that the Westside of Winter Park needs a single individual as their interests have not been represented. This too is off base. The City of Winter Park, through all our funding mechanisms, has invested an overwhelmingly disproportionate share of revenue to the Westside. We have also created and continue to support social programs in this area, again in a significantly disproportionate allocation. The City's efforts over multiple city commissions, have made the Westside a safer, more economically and socially diverse neighborhood.
    - Coincidentally, if the City were divided up into four districts as is currently being discussed, four members of the current commission would already fall into the Westside district. So, the Westside is also already disproportionately represented on the City Commission.
  3. Some posit that having single member districts will assist in having a person of color seated on the Winter Park City Commission. Of the roughly 32,000 residents of the City of Winter Park, 7.64% identify as Black or African American. No member of any demographic group is relegated to living in a single neighborhood and indeed Winter Park has socially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods, so geographic division does not address this issue. Even if every single individual of any one group that comprised 7.64% of our total population AND lived in a single area, AND agreed on every issue, AND agreed to support one of their own individuals, they would still only represent roughly 30% of the district.
    - SMDs will not guarantee or assist a person of any one group a seat on the City Commission.

On this issue:

- Process/Community Support:
  - There has been NO significant petition effort to date.
  - A City Commission candidate made the item a campaign issue and received less than 8% of the vote.
- Underrepresented Area:

- The Westside has received a disproportionate share of city support compared to any other neighborhood in the city.
- Currently four members of the City Commission reside in the area that would be the Westside district.
- City Commission Diversity:
  - We have a geographically diverse population. Dividing the city into districts will not help place a person of color on the dais.

As explained above, you can understand why I find this to be: *“A completely absurd, pointless, or useless errand.”* We should be focused on managing the COVID-19 crisis and the economic, social and emotional hit on our community, not doing the bidding of a small group with strategies that do not align with their goals. We can, and should however, encourage qualified members of our community, of every demographic group to become more involved in our city and perhaps even seek a seat on the City Commission.

Be well – Steve

Steven Leary  
Mayor, City of Winter Park

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**From:** Peter Weldon <[peterjweldon@outlook.com](mailto:peterjweldon@outlook.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 15, 2020 8:50 AM  
**To:** Steven Leary  
**Subject:** [External] SMD

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Steve,

I have been thinking about the single member districts proposal and am curious about your thoughts on the issue. When you have time I would welcome a call or email about this.

Regards, Pete Weldon