



NEWS RELEASE

City of Martinez
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Subject: District Elections – City of Martinez

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MARTINEZ – On October 24, 2017, the City received a certified letter from Attorney Kevin Shenkman of Shenkman & Hughes, which alleged that voting within the City is racially polarized, resulting in minority vote dilution and that the City’s at-large elections violate the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 (“CVRA”). Specifically, the letter alleged that, “Martinez’s at-large system dilutes the ability of Latinos (a ‘protected class’) to elect candidates of their choice or otherwise influence the outcome of Martinez’s City Council elections.”

A growing number of cities in California are facing CVRA demands and lawsuits since it became effective in 2003. The CVRA, in an attempt to prevent disenfranchisement of protected classes of persons, establishes a cause of action for minority voters seeking to force cities to convert from at-large to by-district elections if certain conditions are met. Numerous public agencies in California have been sued under the CVRA. Plaintiffs challenging at-large elections in the City of Palmdale prevailed in the only case to be tried to judgment under the Act so far, but several cities, school districts and hospital districts have settled with challengers, either prior to or in the midst of litigation brought pursuant to the CVRA.

Cities and other public entities have a statutory obligation to reimburse successful challengers for their attorneys’ fees pursuant to the CVRA, including if districts are voluntarily adopted in response to litigation in some cases. Due to the significant costs of defending against these lawsuits, the vast majority of cities have therefore voted to voluntarily transition to district-based elections.

In order to avoid extremely costly litigation and even the possibility of liability under the CVRA—notwithstanding the lack of merit of these allegations—the City may switch to a district-based voting system, in which the City is divided into districts and only the voters in each particular district decide the candidate from that district who will represent that district on the City Council.

Public comments on the transition to district-based elections and the proposed district map(s) are very important and all residents within the City are encouraged to participate in these hearings. Several public hearings will be held in the Council Chambers at City Hall on the dates noted below at 7:00 p.m.

Public Hearing No. 1	December 20, 2017
Public Hearing No. 2	January 10, 2018
Publication of Draft Map(s)	January 17, 2018
Public Hearing No. 3	January 24, 2018
Public Hearing No. 4 (Introduction of Ordinance)	February 7, 2018
Public Hearing No. 5 (Adoption of Ordinance)	February 21, 2018

The public is encouraged to attend these meetings, learn about the process, and provide input and comments to the City Council.

The City of Martinez currently uses an at-large election system in which all voters in the City have the opportunity to vote for candidates for all seats on the City Council. At the City Council Meeting on December 6, 2017, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 135-17 declaring its intent to transition to district-based elections in response to Mr. Shenkman's letter.

If you would like further information, please visit the City's website at http://www.cityofmartinez.org/gov/district_elections.asp

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