

City Council Independence or *'more of the same with a different name'?*

COAL, along with many others, applaud a more independent city council. A more independent City Council can lead to local governance reflective of the will of the electorate, more so than the will of one individual. But COAL understands that to replace the Mayor's backroom dealings with city council backroom dealings will not lead to improved governance that has the confidence and support of the governed.

COAL joins the Better Government Association (BGA), League of Women Voters (LWV) and others, such as former State Senator Rickey Hendon, in the position that the move by the lame-duck city council to increase the number of committees and name committee chairs before the newly elected city council is sworn in is not the way its *break for independence* should be done.

"The Better Government Association and the League of Women Voters of Chicago strongly urge a robust and public discussion of potential changes, with the adoption of any formal rules and committee assignments left until after the newly and re-elected Council members take their seats in May."

Former state senator Rickey Hendon and others want the council to start all over again next month, after Brandon Johnson has been sworn in as Chicago's new mayor.

Maneuvers, by the soon-to-be-reconstituted city council body, during the lame-duck session, do not represent independence or progress, rather it appears to be more of the same back room dealing under a thin patina of the city council flexing its independence. **This action must be corrected.**

COAL calls on our senior aldermen such as 3rd Ward Ald. Dowell, 8th Ward Ald. Harris, 9th Ward Ald. Beale, and others, along with Black Caucus lead 28th Ward Ald. Ervin, to do this the right way, and to demonstrate leadership reflective of a city council that will use more independence in a manner that serves the residents of Chicago and that will lead to more deliberative and improved legislative and policy outcomes. **This requires the city council to undo what the lame-duck session has done and to restart the 'move to a more independent city council' process.**

COAL calls on the city council to:

1. **Return to the starting number of committees, with the current sitting chairs.** Expanding the number of committees requires debate by the newly elected city council that starts with the swearing in of new and returning aldermen on May 15th. That is the point at which this process should begin.
2. **Discuss and finalize the number of committees and the budget required to support the final number,** with the goal of minimizing any increase in our tax dollars required to fund committees. The number and scope of responsibilities for committees must be weighed against costs so that we as residents can understand the benefits of this investment of our tax dollars.

Note: let's talk honestly...28 committees, in a body comprised of 50 members, **is ridiculous;** were the existing 19 effective? This must be discussed and potentially include public hearings.

3. **Re-select and vote in new committee chairs.** The newly elected city council (post May 15th) should select the committee chairs that will lead the work of the city council for its term. This will better reflect the will of the voters who have spoken on February 28th and April 4th.

Note: The actions taken in the lame-duck session must be thrown out; no alderman should keep the chair assigned in the lame duck session. **COAL encourages the city council to prove that it isn't 'more of the same by a different name' by voting in different chairs for the final named committees.**

4. **Honor seniority in naming committee chairs, as well as knowledge in the subject areas.** A combination of aldermanic seniority and having subject matter experience and/or knowledge in a committee's area of focus, as a basis for chairing a committee, will provide the electorate with the sense that the city council is truly turning the corner on the old way of doing business and will work to be more objective in naming chairs.

Note: This point does not negate preceding point #3. Seniority and experience notwithstanding, *no committee should retain its previous chair.*

5. **Define an overarching committee framework** for how a committee must operate including minimum number of meetings, a template for reports to the mayor, city council and public, and the mechanism by which departments/agencies falling under the oversight of the committee must report its performance to the committee.

6. **Hold a training session on *what a city council committee is, its structure, goals and responsibilities, for all freshmen aldermen.*** Newly elected aldermen should understand what they are voting on. This session must be held prior to deciding on the expansion of committees and the vote on new committee chairs.

7. **Set an aggressive timeline for completing the above and communicate this to the public.**

Essentially, COAL is asking the city council, those elected to represent us at the local level, to rise to this momentous point in the history of Chicago city governance. A point at which the City Council not only talks the words of being stronger and more independent, but starts off and follows through, in form and substance.

What say you?

COAL urges new aldermen, sworn into office on May 15th, not to accept the maneuverings of the lame-duck session.

Importantly, COAL recommends and fully expects that as the city council moves forward in putting more independent processes in place, that it does so with the full support and engagement of Mayor Brandon Johnson and his new leadership team.

