

Mitchell proposes four year term of office for future mayors

With his administration focused on New Bedford's long-term future, Mayor Jon Mitchell today presented the City Council with a proposal to modernize the term of office for mayor from two to four years. The modification, Mitchell said, would enhance the municipality's ability to build a stronger future for itself by promoting stability in its executive branch, encouraging its chief executive to focus on the city's long-term best interests and reducing the time diverted from governmental duties to campaigning and fundraising.

To avoid any suggestion that his proposal is motivated by personal political considerations, Mayor Mitchell also submitted a proposed amendment that would set the effective date of the act after the current mayor leaves office.

"If the council passes the amendment, I would not be eligible to be elected to a four-year term. This proposal is not about me, it is about the long term interests of the City we love," he said.

A change in the term of office for mayor requires an amendment to the City of New Bedford's charter. Mayor Mitchell has proposed the charter change as a Special Act which requires the approval of the City Council as well as the state legislature before it may take effect.

In a detailed letter to the Council outlining his proposal, Mayor Mitchell highlighted the serious disadvantages associated with the City retaining a two-year term for the office of mayor, "I believe that the adoption of a four-year term is necessary because the current two-year term impedes our ability to build the better future we all want for our

City, in that it (1) tends to undermine the general effectiveness of the executive branch; (2) skews policy and program initiatives toward narrow or trivial short term interests; (3) diverts time and energy to mobilizing campaign organizations and to campaign fundraising and away from important governmental duties; and puts New Bedford at a competitive disadvantage versus cities with more modern mayoral structures.”

He pointed to the need for stability in the City’s executive branch and with that the importance of devoting all of the mayor’s attention and energy on the leading the city with a clear focus on the long-term. “That a mayor would be subject to a re-election campaign by the time he or she has just gotten up-and-running, in which the outcome may be the election of someone entirely new who would start the process all over again, is inherently destabilizing. Mayors serve the public best when they set clear, broad and achievable long-term goals and stay the course until they are realized. A four year term would significantly reduce the time necessary to campaign and to raise campaign contributions, which displace time spent governing,” Mitchell said.

Nearly every major city in the United States has adopted a four year mayoral term. Once adopted, New Bedford would join the increasing number of Massachusetts cities with a four-year term for mayor including, Boston, Pittsfield, Quincy, and Springfield.