

Opinion: New Bedford Should Have Four-Year Terms for Mayor

The municipal election season is creeping up on the community, and the SouthCoast Chamber has joined in a community effort to amend the City Charter to change the term for the Mayor's position from two years to four years.

The position of mayor in New Bedford is roughly the equivalent of that of a CEO, running a complex business that must deal with the here and now of expenditures and revenue while also setting a vision for the future that requires deep commitment of time and energy toward goals that may bear fruit many years down the road. Unlike CEO's who generally serve at the pleasure of their boards of directors or in some cases shareholders, the mayor serves at the pleasure of the voters of the city, as do the Governor, the President and all elected officials.

We give the President and the Governor four years, and increasingly mayoral seats in the Commonwealth are now four-year terms in order to give mayors time to make progress on longer-term goals while running the daily operations of their cities. New Bedford Fourward, a community group formed for the purpose of addressing this important issue, is looking to make our city the 20th in the Commonwealth to offer a four-year term for mayor, joining Quincy and West Springfield as the most recent communities to make the change from two years to four.

In a 2016 article appearing in the Massachusetts Municipal Association publication, Mayor William Reichelt of West Springfield wrote about the shortcomings of a two-year term.

"Especially for a new mayor, once you get in, by the time you

figure out municipal government and the ropes of the job you're essentially running again," he wrote. "You don't have the time to learn the budget and get your goals in place before you're getting back on the ballot. To get anything real done and have a real impact on the budget is going to take more than two years." New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell has often echoed those comments within his State of the City address.

Once New Bedford Fourward gathers the signatures necessary to place the issue on the ballot, New Bedford voters will have the opportunity in November to make a necessary change to the city's governance, allowing the CEO of our city to concentrate on making positive change for New Bedford, rather than constantly having to gear up to run for re-election. There would be no change to the term of office for the mayoral race in this election cycle, but if approved voters would be able to have their say on the first four-year mayor in 2019 when the next cycle would begin.

Our city deserves strong and consistent leadership with a vision for greatness. Greatness, however, takes time, and a four-year term for the most important elected position in our city is a logical and necessary change in New Bedford. Signature pages are available for registered New Bedford voters at the Chamber office at 794 Purchase Street in Downtown New Bedford. Check out New Bedford Fourward at www.facebook.com/newbedfordfourward.

Rick Kidder, President & CEO
SouthCoast Chamber

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce, d/b/a SouthCoast Chamber, is a member of New Bedford Fourward, a community group formed to advocate for a four-year term for the position of Mayor of New Bedford.