Statement about November charter revision ballot

On November 8th, the residents of New Britain will be asked to vote on the revision of the city of New Britain charter. The city charter is the equivalent of the city constitution and therefore this vote is important as it affects all residents. The Charter Revision includes two questions – one calls for changing the structure of the elections from 10 elected at the ward level and 5 at large to all elected at the ward level. The second question includes three different and unrelated questions – making two positions appointed rather than elected, creating highly paid city manager position, and requiring – charter review every 5 years.

Recently, the Democratic Town Committee of New Britain voted AGAINST this ballot and I, as the Minority Leader on the Common Council, am also against this ballot. The main reasons are that it reduces voters’ choice, reduces the power balance between the Common Council and the mayor, reduces Common Council accountability, and increases the bureaucracy and city budget burden. All in all, this revision reduces the voice of the city residents and their ability to influence city affairs.

Regarding a reduction of voters’ choice, first and foremost the second question on this ballot lumps up three different questions and by that reduces voters’ choice who might agree with some but not all questions. Each of the three questions should have been listed separately. Second, this ballot proposes making revenue collector and town Clerk an appointed position which reduces voters’ choice. The voters should decide on these positions and not the mayor.

Second, this ballot reduces the power of the Common Council by eliminating the 5 at-large membership and requiring minority party representation. Both in Congress and the state of Connecticut we have a combination of large and local representation – congressional districts provide smaller local representation while the senate provides for whole state representation. Similarly, we have state representatives and senate in Connecticut. We should maintain this balance at the city as well with 10 representers of the five districts and 5 at large.

Furthermore, with the minority party representation, it becomes almost impossible for one party to have 10 members required for the mayor’s veto override. Furthermore, since in each district candidates have 3 of 4 chances of being elected instead of the current 50-50 chance, it reduces candidates’ accountability as they are more likely to be voted in once nominated.

Finally, this ballot calls for creating a new position of city manager. This is a highly paid position which will add more to the growing city deficit. The mayor of New Britain recently received large increases in her salary, and she should continue doing her job, there is no need to further burden the taxpayers. If a system that relies on a city manager is more desirable the city charter should then call for a mayor who has less responsibilities and gets paid less as most towns who utilize city managers do. For the city our size, there is no need for both a city manager and a strong mayor.