



**RARELY RUNNING:
*WHY AREN'T MORE
PEOPLE RUNNING FOR
PARK RIDGE CITY
COUNCIL?***

September 1, 2022

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Introduction

The League of Women Voters (LWV) is a national nonpartisan, grassroots nonprofit dedicated to empowering everyone to fully participate in our democracy. Over the years, the LWV has built an excellent reputation for providing the public with accurate, nonpartisan services and information on elections and on governmental and public policy issues. Local leagues such as the League of Women Voters of Park Ridge (LWVPR) undertake public education to help citizens understand and participate in government and politics.

In the spring of 2021, local league LWVPR did preliminary research on Park Ridge City Council elections (see Appendix B), and noted the following:

- In 2021, 2 of the 3 Wards up for election were uncontested.
- In 2019, 3 of the 4 Wards up for election were uncontested.
- Only 41% of the aldermanic races were contested between 1999-2021.
- During that same 22-year period, only 21% of the candidates were women.

The fact that nearly 60% of races over a 22-year period were uncontested led LWVPR to wonder why more people don't run for city council, and if anything could be done to encourage more contested elections. On the premise that robust participation in elections is beneficial to a community and the belief that contested elections provide opportunities for the community to hear, learn, and benefit from competing ideas and perspectives, LWVPR embarked on this study in April of 2021.

The goal of this study has been to identify best practices and/or recommended actions to encourage more candidates to run for alderperson positions. In theory, increased participation in local government should nurture a vibrant and robust democracy.

As with all studies and research endeavors, the LWVPR hopes this work will illuminate opportunities for future inquiry and additional opportunities for engagement on this topic.

Methodology

To learn about the community's understanding of the alderperson role and perceptions towards running for office, a study committee engaged targeted groups in surveys and interviews. The Rarely Running Study Committee spent four months completing initial research, reviewing local and national literature on community participation in local elections, and analyzing trends in Park Ridge alderperson races for the last 20 years. Based on this initial research, the group drafted consensus questions. Each of these draft consensus questions can also be seen as hypotheses.

Survey

Survey questions were developed to align with the consensus questions and see whether data from the Park Ridge community would lend support (or not) to the research behind each draft consensus question. The survey included specific response choices on a rating scale and open responses opportunities to share comments related to different areas of the survey. The first question of the survey asked participants if they were residents of Park Ridge to ensure only City residents were surveyed.

To gather survey participants, the Rarely Running Study Committee first identified stakeholder groups that would be uniquely informed about this topic because of either 1) their past or current involvement either serving on, or seeking to serve on, a local board, commission, or the City Council or 2) their current or former leadership role in a local community organization. Within these two areas, we identified several groups that were asked to take the survey (*Table 1*).

To help gather additional input from community leaders, community group contacts were asked to forward the survey invitation to other leaders in their respective organizations.

The survey was first sent to previous and prior community leaders on February 24, 2022. The City of Park Ridge graciously sent our survey request to members of City Boards and Commissions on March 15th, 2022, and the survey remained open until April 10, 2022. Seventy-one community leaders completed the survey responding to questions under the themes of alderperson roles and responsibilities, alderperson time commitment, alderperson compensation, alderperson wards versus at-large positions, Park Ridge City Council Boards and Commissions, alderperson training, and the election/campaign process. These areas were also connected to willingness to run for an alderperson role.

A report was compiled from raw data from the survey so study members could analyze the results for topics and patterns (See Appendix A: Survey Results). Note that LWVPR Board members were invited to take the survey but if they were on the Rarely Running Study Committee, they did not take it.

Table 1. Stakeholder Groups Identified for the Survey

*Some contacts fit into multiple groups, so that the total number of survey contacts is slightly less than the sum of people across groups.

		Community Groups			
Local Government	# of people asked to take the survey	Community Groups	# of people asked to take the survey	Community Groups	# of people asked to take the survey
All City Boards & Commissions	95	Kiwanis	1	Rotary Club	1
Park District Board	12	Action Ridge	2	Park Ridge Lions Club	2
D64 Board	11	Park Ridge Newcomers	1	Go Green Park Ridge	1
D207 Board	9	Republican Women of Park Ridge	1	Park Ridge Community Women	1
Alderspersons, current and past	11	Chamber of Commerce leaders	1	D207 Community Advisory Council	7
Citizens who ran for alderperson in the last 10 years but did not win	9	LWVPR Board (Board members on the study did not participate)	5	PTO/A Officers from 2017-2022, for all D64 schools	56

Interviews

Interview questions were developed based on the report from the aggregate survey data. Interview participants were gathered from survey participants; the final question in our survey allowed survey participants to share their email address and volunteer for an interview. Twenty survey participants volunteered to be interviewed and were compiled into a de-identified list by gender.

Rarely Running Study Committee members not involved in processing the raw survey data were asked to select five men and five women participants to interview based solely on the participants' responses to an open question regarding their interest level. Those selected were contacted for interviews. One male interviewee did not have time to fit it in, so four men and five women participated in follow up interviews.

Interviews were conducted between May 30, 2022 and June 28, 2022. Interviews, which were held virtually in a 1:1 format, consisted of eight questions (Table 2) and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviewers received training on how to conduct qualitative research via interviews; the benefits of probing questions were highlighted.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then stored without participant names to protect their confidentiality. After transcription, original video and audio recordings were destroyed.

Table 2. Interview Questions

- | |
|--|
| 1. Tell me which ward you live in and how you are involved or have been involved in the City and/or community. |
| 2. A friend approaches you about running for an alderperson position in the next election. How might you respond to that suggestion? |
| 3. What are your thoughts about what it would be like to run for alderperson? |
| 4. How many hours per week do you believe alderpersons spend on their role? |
| 5. Let's transition to board/commission roles for the City of Park Ridge. To be appointed to a board/commission (e.g., Planning & Zoning, Historic Preservation, and Health Commission), individuals submit an application and interview with the Mayor's Advisory |

Board, made up of four alderpersons, to discuss their interests and qualifications. The Mayor reviews the recommendations and then makes appointments to the boards/commissions. What are your thoughts on this selection process?

6. Some of the survey participants when asked about running for alderperson mentioned a concern about “fitting in” to City Council. What is your reaction to this?

7. What can be done to promote more civility in our community for local public officials, during the campaign process and while serving in the role?

8. What would you say to encourage a friend to run for alderperson?

Final Consensus Question Development

Based on the results of our surveys, interviews, and initial research, the Rarely Running Study Committee reviewed the consensus questions and selected nine with robust pro and con positions, supported by data, for member review. To allow for thoughtful consideration and review, we’re pleased to share the full report and final consensus questions with the LWVPR ahead of our member event on September 8, 2022. The consensus call will be held on September 22, 2022.

Consensus Questions

1 - Should Park Ridge alderpersons be paid the market rate?

Background:

The salary of an alderperson in Park Ridge is currently \$100 a month. The market average is \$346.88 per month.

PRO:

The salary of an alderperson in Park Ridge is currently \$100 a month. The City of Park Ridge hired McGrath Human Resources Group to conduct a [Classification & Compensation Study](#). The study included a salary analysis of elected officials, and while no specific recommendations were included in the report, “the market average for alderman was listed at \$346.88 per month.” ([Johnson, 2018](#)). As noted in the [Executive Report](#) (p. 27):

The Aldermen would appear to be underpaid in comparison to the market. It is understood that elected officials do not serve their community for the compensation; however, it is necessary to provide a reasonable amount of compensation to encourage individuals to run for office. The compensation provides funds for transportation, babysitting, to offset time away from work, etc. and allows a wider range of individuals to run for office.

A majority of the survey participants agree. Sixty-four percent expressed that the alderperson compensation should align with surrounding communities, and several comments in our survey mentioned how alderpersons are “overworked and underpaid.”

Table 3. Elected Official Market Analysis

<u>Job Title</u> <u>Description</u>	<u>2017 Avg</u> <u>Salary of</u> <u>Incumbents</u>	<u>Mkt Avg</u> <u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Comp</u> <u>Ratio</u>
Aldermen	\$100.00	\$346.88	-21%
Mayor	\$1,000.00	\$861.67	66%
City Clerk	\$750.00	\$337.50	172%

(Table 3 from Classification & Compensation Study Executive Report For City of Park Ridge, IL)

The City has been aware of the issue and considering updating the compensation for alderpersons since at least 2019, when the competitive pay for all city positions, including alderpersons, was included in the city’s Short-Term Routine Goals from the [City of Park Ridge Strategic Plan and Goal Development 2019](#). It states, “revisit the City’s recent compensation study data related to all positions including aldermanic compensation, ensure compensation philosophy remains competitive and market appropriate” (p. 17).

Additionally, [The City of Park Ridge Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026](#) includes addressing this issue as an objective tied to a significant city goal. As presented on August 15, 2022, the goal is listed as: “Evaluate City Council operations to increase effectiveness, participation and attract new leaders in service” (p. 13). The specific objective is “Research and recommend a compensation plan for elected officials to increase the attractiveness of the offices for interested future candidates.” In [Compensating City Councils](#), Zale (2018) asserted, “undercompensation is problematic because it may result in making elected office an option only to those wealthy enough to afford it” (p. 839). Zale further reported, “compensation procedures affect who governs our cities” (p. 839) because “low pay may have a disproportionate impact on already underrepresented groups, such as minorities and women” (p. 884).

CON:

Several comments from the survey suggested that “higher compensation should never be the motivation behind running for an alderperson office in Park Ridge” since the role is about “public service to the community.” One resident described that “spending more money [on alderperson’s salaries] would add costs without benefits.”

Zale (2018), validated this notion: “the term ‘public servant’ reflects the fact that we want and expect our elected officials to serve the public, not to profit from government service” (p. 878). Forty-two percent of the survey participants perceived that a compensation change would not encourage more people to run, with 69% of these respondents having board/commission experience (a potential pipeline/fit for the alderperson role).

Resources:

City of Park Ridge (2022, August 15). Strategic Plan Presentation. Park Ridge City Council Regular Meeting. Retrieved August 16, 2022 from

https://parkridge.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=2264&meta_id=103335

Johnson, J. (2020, October 22). Park Ridge Aldermen opt not to increase pay for elected officials next year, but some open to future talks. *The Park Ridge Herald-Advocate*. Retrieved from

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/park-ridge/ct-prh-no-raises-tl-1029-20201022-mxa5ghkp25cojl7llqa55cquji-story.html>

Johnson, J. (2018, January 29). Study recommends raises, changes in Park Ridge City Employee pay ranges. *The Park Ridge Herald-Advocate*. Retrieved from

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/park-ridge/ct-prh-compensation-study-tl-0201-20180129-story.html>

McGrath Human Resources Group. (2018). Classification & compensation study: Executive report for City of Park Ridge, IL. Retrieved from

https://parkridge.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=254&meta_id=11615

Zale, K. (2018). Compensating City Councils. *Stanford Law Review*, 70, 842-920.

2 - Should the City continue exploring opportunities to streamline processes and allow alderpersons to work more efficiently?

PRO:

When asked to comment about what discourages people from running for alderperson, twenty-two percent of the survey participants affirmatively wrote comments identifying the time commitment for the role. Recently, the city suspended its longtime practice of assigning each alderperson to serve as a liaison to one or more of the city commissions/boards. Serving as a liaison was often a time-consuming responsibility because it involved attending the commission meetings. The time involved in this role was noted by some respondents to the survey. If this change is continued, it could affect how people feel about running for office because it impacts the amount of time involved to serve.

Similarly, over the last several years, the Park Ridge City Council decided to reduce meetings over the summer. In the associated [May 16, 2022 Memo to City Council](#) supporting the change, Park Ridge City Manager Gilmore noted, “Testing these modified schedules the past few years has shown we can operate effectively with fewer meetings.” Lihn Hoang (2019) reported most city councils meet every two weeks. For example, the cities of Elmhurst, Des Plaines, and Rolling Meadows host city council meetings every other week. It should be noted that on average, each of those communities had a higher percentage of contested elections than Park Ridge over the last 6 election cycles, from 2011 through 2021.

Both changes reflect a commitment to streamline the work of alderpersons. Continuing to find ways to encourage the notion of “working smarter” may promote a healthy and manageable workload for the alderperson role. Although results were evenly mixed, 44% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the weekly meeting would deter them from running. Sixty-two percent of the survey participants who expressed agreement about the weekly meetings being a deterrent had prior or current board/commission experience.

Also during the [May 16, 2022 Park Ridge City Council Meeting](#), City Manager Gilmore added that through an extended pilot of the reduced meeting schedule, City Council may be able to identify additional opportunities to streamline work and increase efficiencies. During the August 15, 2022 regular meeting of the City Council, the [City of Park Ridge Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026](#) included a goal to, “evaluate City Council operations to increase effectiveness, participation and attract new leaders in service.” The LWVPR should applaud the inclusion of this goal, as this type of exercise

should be ongoing, so that citizens can see that alderpersons' time is respected and used most effectively.

CON:

Since meetings are “only the tip of the time commitment iceberg for alderpersons” as stated by a survey participant, even if the number of meetings were reduced, the time commitment may not be reduced. If the Park Ridge City Council might change to only meet every other week, this might lengthen the meetings; therefore, not altering the time needed for the role. The “iceberg” metaphor—communicating that the majority of the work an alderperson does is not visible—was included on the [Seventh Ward Alderman Vacancy posting](#).

Related, several survey comments highlighted the time commitment involved in the alderperson role, mentioning that “public service” requires “work and dedication” if the job is “taken seriously and done properly...There are events/functions in the community, preparation time for the meetings, and time to be present for their constituents.” Since the role of an alderperson includes connecting with the community and being present at community events, if the time spent for meetings was reduced, the time needed for the overall role would not be affected.

Resources:

City of Park Ridge (2022, May 16). Agenda Cover Memorandum. Park Ridge City Council Regular Meeting. Retrieved from https://parkridge.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=2177&meta_id=98987

City of Park Ridge (2022, August 15). Strategic Plan Presentation. Park Ridge City Council Regular Meeting. Retrieved from https://parkridge.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=2264&meta_id=103335

City of Park Ridge (2022). Updated Seventh Ward Alderman Vacancy. Retrieved from https://www.parkridge.us/news_detail_T7_R128.php

Lihn Hoang, B. (2019). Race and Legislative Responsiveness in City Council Meetings. *Urban Affairs Review*, 55(6), 1579-1611.

3 - Should the roles of Park Ridge City Council members be at-large instead of representing wards? **No Consensus**

Background:

The City of Park Ridge government is comprised of seven wards and one mayor. Each alderperson represents their own geographic ward. An at-large arrangement refers to a system in which all elected council members represent the entire municipality.

PRO:

To preface this discussion, survey results showed that a number of respondents were unclear about which ward they reside in (15%), and that a majority were unsure or didn't understand what the alderperson does for their ward (55%), which indicates that there would be little or no impact on their decision to run for office based on the ward or at-large structure. For perspective, those who were invited to complete the survey were considered leaders in Park Ridge with some level of investment in the community.

So, while only 30% of survey participants said they would be more likely to run for an at-large role, it should be noted that 44% of survey respondents expressed uncertainty about an at-large versus a ward structure encouraging more people to run for an alderperson role. This uncertainty was present across this line of survey questioning of wards and an at-large structure (*Figure 1*).

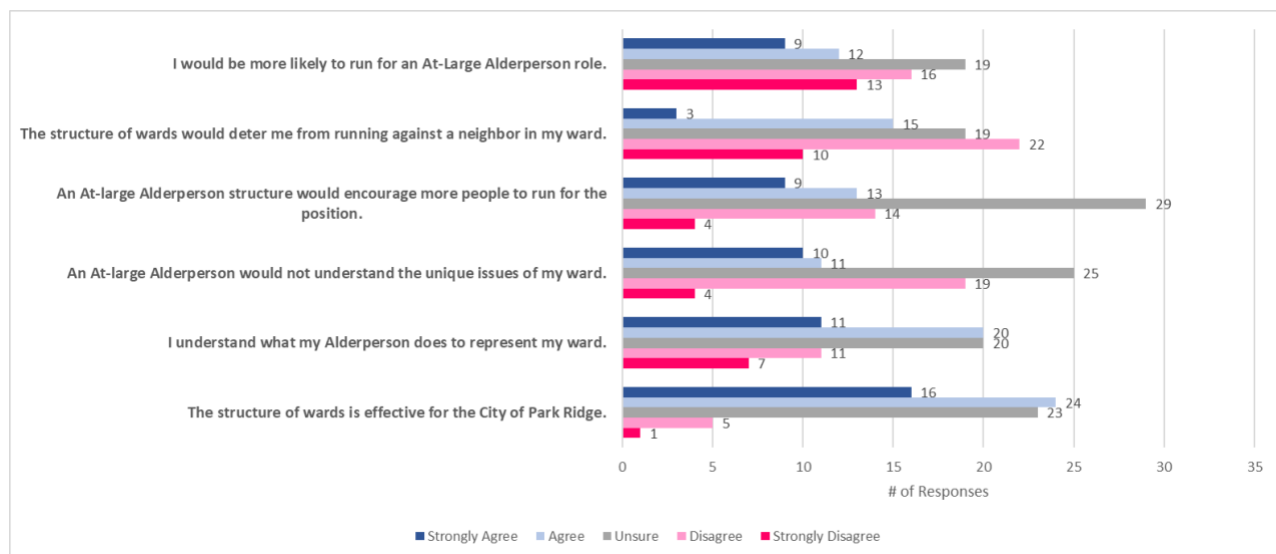


FIGURE 1

As one participant noted, “at-large is an interesting concept, but I’m unclear how that might resolve the time commitment issue.” Further, the relatively high level of uncertainty noted in responses to all survey questions relating to at-large systems makes sense because the ward structure is the one with which most of the participants are likely most familiar.

In fact, most municipalities in the northwest suburbs of Chicago have at-large government structures. Out of 26 municipalities in the northwest Chicago suburbs, 19 (73%) have at-large trustees and only seven (27%) have a ward structure.

Also, the number of cities with ward structures decreases when the population increases. According to the Journal & Topics Media Group (2022), nine of thirteen communities with a population over 35,000 (69%), have at-large trustees and only four (31%) have wards.

Even within the ward structure in our municipality, much of Park Ridge is governed at-large. City business and the budget are not organized by wards. Rather, city business is conducted via four committees, each led by a different alderperson: Finance, Public Works, Public Safety, and Procedures & Regulations. And as an interviewee noted, “...the ward Aldermen don't hold any significant power over their wards. I mean they all still need a majority of votes between all the wards.” As stated by another survey respondent:

Alderspersons have little power within the wards. Council votes basically are at-large already. Only difference is each neighborhood (ward) is represented instead of a majority of citizens all from the north side of park ridge making decisions that affect the south side, and vice versa.

Presumably, for citizens who understand this, the ward versus at-large issue would likely have a neutral effect on their decision to run for office. Also, while many respondents expressed a preference for a ward system as opposed to an at-large system as a form of government, some survey comments that expressly addressed what impact those options have on running for office showed support for the at-large model.

Because at-large representatives can focus on the whole community, citizens who are concerned about some of the negative aspects of running for office and serving if elected might find an at-large candidacy more palatable. As one respondent noted, “A successful run for an aldermanic ward position depends in large part on a person’s popularity and personality. An at-large position may be less influenced by these traits....”

Another respondent stated, “I want to run for alderman but my representative is a neighbor, their children attend my childrens' school and I can't run against that person.” Another pointed out a concern about stagnation that can occur with ward structures that “rewards incumbents” because “those who have represented a given ward for a long time tend to stay there.”

As reported by the [National League of Cities \(2016\)](#), the number of candidates in at-large elections tends to be higher. From our research, there is evidence that at-large systems do generate more participation by women in elections. This was borne out in our research comparing local at-large and ward election data. When LWVPR looked at seven local at-large municipalities comparable to Park Ridge, we found that women participated in at-large contests at an overall rate of 73% over the 20-year period between 2001 and 2021 (See Appendix B).

This is a much higher rate than has occurred in Park Ridge City Council elections over the same period, where women only threw their hat in the ring in 33% of the contests. It's also higher than the rate women participated in elections over the past 10 years in five comparable municipalities with ward structures, which averaged out to only 29%.

CON:

Most respondents had a negative view of at-large representation which would likely translate to less willingness to run for office. The majority (58%) of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that the ward structure is effective. Twenty-nine percent of respondents agreed that at-large representatives would not understand the unique issues of the wards. As one survey respondent commented, “I don't think an at-large alderperson would be as effective as one from their ward in addressing problems unique to the ward and I don't think they would care as much.” Some expressed their general negative perception about at-large arrangements. One interviewee shared, “I have relatives that live in a community that have at-large representation and this is not a great way to run a city.”

Others noted that at-large structures would not geographically balance representation for all areas of the city. A survey comment explained this need:

I don't know the extent to which City issues are specific to wards. But I do like the concept of alderpersons being distributed around the city. At-large alderpersons could get concentrated in one part of the city - which doesn't seem like a good idea.

Another survey comment further advocated the benefits of having alderpersons in different geographic areas:

When you have AT-LARGE positions, it is easier to ATTACK a neighborhood with no real concern of the consequences. Also, a large area will most likely NOT be represented because there will be no one on the board that lives in that area, thus no concern if that area is somehow put on the bottom of the list for infrastructure OR top of the list for PILOT programs that many believe will be detrimental to their area.

Districts (wards) may improve citizen participation and engagement because their alderperson is more connected to the neighborhood [National League of Cities \(2016\)](#).

The survey collected data do not indicate that having an at-large structure would impact the number of candidates running. When asked if an at-large structure would encourage the respondent to run, 42% of survey participants disagreed or strongly disagreed; 32% percent agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if a ward structure would deter the respondent from running (due to potentially running against a neighbor), 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed while only 26% agreed or strongly agreed. A survey participant commented, "At-large does not change the equation for my specific interest in being an alderperson."

Resources:

Encyclopedia of Chicago, Park Ridge, Illinois. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2203.html>

ICMA. (2019). *ICMA Survey Research: 2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey, Summary of Survey Results*. Retrieved from <https://icma.org/2018-municipal-fog-survey>

Illinois Municipal League (2021). *A Candidate's Guide to Municipal Government, 2021 Municipal Election Edition*

Journal & Topics Media Group (2022). *Progress 2022, 42nd Annual Business & Industry Edition*

National League of Cities. (2016, December 14). *Cities 101 - - At-large and District Elections*. Retrieved from <https://www.cityofws.org/DocumentCenter/View/13991/Cities-101---District-v-At-Large-Elections---National-League-of-Cities-pdf>

Office of the Illinois Secretary of State. *Name Index to Illinois Local Governments*. Retrieved from <https://apps.ilsos.gov/isa/localgovnameindexsrch.jsp>

Park Ridge Historical Society. *Early History*. Retrieved from <https://www.parkridgehistorycenter.org/history/early-history/>

Wikipedia List of municipalities in Illinois. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_municipalities_in_Illinois

4 - Should the job description for Park Ridge alderpersons be available to the public?

Background:

All open employment positions posted by the City of Park Ridge include a description detailing the specifics and qualifications for the role. There is no detailed job description posted for elected positions, including alderpersons.

PRO:

A job description provides clarity of the role for those serving, for residents to easily learn about the role, and to expand the pool of those who may consider the role in the future.

Survey participants overwhelmingly believe the job description should be available to the public (98.6%). Further, more women (26%) than men (17%) survey participants were unsure about the role of an alderperson.

From the survey, a participant stated: “A job description with all responsibilities should be clear and direct to inform the individual of what all is involved. No doubt, it is extensive.”

Examples of alderperson job descriptions in other cities can be referenced. The City of Decatur, IL posts the duties, compensation, and qualifications of Council on their [website](#). In reviewing nearby cities to Park Ridge, the City of Elmhurst, cited as a comparable city in the draft version of the [Park Ridge Wonderful: The City of Park Ridge’s Comprehensive Plan of 2020](#), posts a [user-friendly manual](#) that clearly explains the structure and process of its city government. Further, The National League of Cities details a list of [council job functions](#) such as “reviewing and approving the annual budget, establishing long and short-term objectives and priorities, establishing tax rates, responding to constituent needs and complaints.”

CON:

The community understands the alderperson role; therefore, a formal job description is not needed. A majority of survey participants (63.38%) had clarity about the role of an alderperson, and 61% said they understood the time commitment involved in the alderperson role.

As one survey respondent commented, “The roles are pretty straight forward as well as their responsibilities.”

Survey data also suggests that providing the job description would not necessarily encourage citizens to run since 62% percent would be unsure or not likely to run if the job description was clearer. A survey comment included a similar perspective: “[I] do not believe a clear understanding of the roles and responsibility is what’s preventing more people from considering to run for alderperson.”

Resources:

The City of Decatur, Illinois. (2022). *Job Descriptions*. Retrieved from <https://decaturil.gov/mayor-and-council/job-descriptions/>

The City of Elmhurst (2020, December). *Elmhurst City Council 101 Understanding and Interacting with Your Local Government*. Retrieved from <https://www.elmhurst.org/DocumentCenter/View/14024/Elmhurst-City-Council-101-Understanding-and-Interactive-with-your-local-government-PDF?bidId>

National League of Cities. *City Councils*. Retrieved from <https://www.nlc.org/city-councils/>

Park Ridge Wonderful Our City’s New Comprehensive Plan. *Draft Comprehensive Plan Chapters: Draft Introduction + History + Community Profile*. Retrieved from https://parkridgewonderful.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/draft_chapter-1_intro_history_community-profile_200526-cow.pdf

5 - Should formal training be held for all new Park Ridge alderpersons, in addition to the mandatory training?

Background:

After an alderperson is sworn in, the City of Park Ridge department heads (e. g., Public Works, Finance, etc.) meet with the new alderperson to give an overview of City operations. This process is not currently formalized to be consistent for new officials, such as when alderpersons are appointed to the role. Additionally, there is no formal process for onboarding alderpersons to understand the City of Park Ridge City Council meeting process and agendas (e.g., the structure of a meeting, how items get added to the agenda, how items are amended, etc.) Without a formal process in place, alderpersons learn as they go, presumably by asking questions and relying on experienced alderpersons to provide guidance.

PRO:

Sanbonmatsu et al. (2009) noted that training, especially for women, offers a foundation for leadership and gives confidence to execute the city council role competently.

A clear majority of survey participants (88%) agreed that training should be consistent for both appointees and those elected. Notable comments from the survey include:

- “Currently, there is no structured or formal training for an alderperson provided by the city or city council.”
- “Good training is always going to be a great investment for leadership roles.”
- “Consistent training should be required. That is without question, in my opinion.”
- “I believe that training as well as prior experience is essential in the development of a competent elected official.”

In [Learning the Ropes: A Case Study of the Onboarding Process for Newly Elected City Councilors](#) Gilbert (2020), identifies the challenges many new alderpersons experience (p. iv):

The difficulties for onboarding such as the steep learning curve when assimilating to their new roles on municipal councils. Their skills and experience prior to being elected often do not align with the skills required, such as municipal budgeting, navigating intricate government processes, and handling a broad range of constituent feedback.

At the root of the issue, the author identifies the key challenge, “typically, newly elected officials only receive a brief orientation before they must vote on council business” (p. iv). The case study further highlights the importance of onboarding in the private sector to “reduce the learning curve and minimize mistakes.” However, the study notes that in local government, there is not the same attention given to the “depth and breadth of the onboarding” process (p. 5).

The City of Urbana, Illinois, shares the governmental structure of Park Ridge, consisting of a Mayor, City Clerk, and seven Council Members (one for each ward). Urbana’s population of over 42,000 is just slightly greater than that of Park Ridge. Urbana partnered with the Illinois Municipal League to offer an in-person workshop to give voters confidence that their City Council members would act in the city’s best interest.

CON:

More than half of survey participants (54.84%) were either unsure or disagreed that formal/mandatory training would impact their decision to run.

Mandatory training may consume limited staff time and resources.

Training bias can be a concern, particularly if led by a party with a perceived agenda, like an outside organization or staff. For instance, if led by staff, it could be perceived as staff leading the people who were elected to oversee their work.

Resources:

Gilbert, C. T. (2020). *Learning the Ropes: A case study of the onboarding process for newly elected city councilors*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Maine]. USM Digital Commons. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=muskie-dissertations>

Illinois Municipal League Resources. (2022). *Education Resources*. Retrieved from <https://www.iml.org/education>

Sanbonmatsu, K., Carroll, S. J., & Walsh, D. (2009). *Poised to Run: Women’s Pathways to State Legislatures*. Center for American Women and Politics: Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics. Retrieved from https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/poisedtorun_0.pdf

6 – Should citizens be encouraged to motivate others to consider running for Park Ridge City Council and identify ways they can support increased mentorship of local leaders who may decide to run?

PRO:

Data from the surveys and interviews indicate that active encouragement to run for council as well as provision of mentorship opportunities for those considering a run could increase the number of citizens who decide to file as a candidate. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider running if they were encouraged to do so. Sixty-five percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more likely to run for an alderperson position if they had a mentor to support them.

As reported by Oliver (2012) in a survey of city council members and candidates from a wide variety of municipalities in Cook, Lake, and DuPage counties, the second most popular pathway to local politics was being recruited by someone else—either through an appointment, or by another politician or family member. “[W]ho you know seems to be a crucial factor for determining whether someone gets involved in local affairs”(p. 102).

The survey data also delineated that encouragement to run needs to be paired with some ongoing mentorship through the process. One respondent described the campaign process as being similar to “flying blind in the dark.” Another pointed out that the process would be difficult to navigate without a mentor, and that they would not have run without ongoing support, stating that encouragement alone was not enough. Another reported that it’s important to be mentored, supported, and educated during the campaign process.

This ongoing support could help offset or blunt one of the most cited factors that prevents candidacy—concerns about negative or personal attacks via social media and otherwise. As one respondent shared, “I was encouraged to run, with offers of assistance and words of guidance.... But once underway, many of those that had previously offered support...started becoming less and less reachable.”

The positive impacts of encouragement on likeliness to run is supported by research done at the [Women & Politics Institute](#). Regardless of the root of the gender differences, the affects of encouragement to run for office are substantial. Sixty-six percent of women who received encouragement to run for office reported interest in a future candidacy, compared to 21% who never received encouragement to run. For men, 84% of those who were encouraged to run for office considered doing so, while just 32% who did not receive encouragement were open to running for office in the future [Lawless & Fox \(2013\)](#).

There is strong evidence that candidacy by women, in particular, would benefit from encouragement and ongoing mentorship during the campaign process, as many women express a number of hurdles regarding candidacy and public service. Strikingly, 70% of women who participated in the survey reported that they would be more likely to run if they had a mentor supporting them in their efforts. However, women are less likely to receive that encouragement: “Clearly, encouragement to run for office motivates many young women and men to consider a future candidacy. But women are substantially less likely than men to receive this encouragement at all, as well as to have it come from multiple sources.” [\(Lawless & Fox \(2013\)\)](#).

Men are also found to be more confident about running for public office and feel more qualified to fill these roles. These same authors advocate that women are successful in their positions after being elected, but the problem is that women do not run and are not encouraged to run. From the survey data, on a scale of 1-10 in the context of likeliness to run for an alderperson role, men reported an average of 5.68 with women reporting an average of 3.77, furthering the argument that women might need more encouragement or mentorship. Ridge (2016) similarly articulated that “women were significantly more likely to say they ran because no one else was running and they were asked to run” (p. 101).

In light of these findings, it’s not surprising that it was reported in 2014 that women filled less than 15 percent of the city manager positions nationally, and that this percentage has been consistent for over 20 years Walker (2018). In addition, and closer to home, during the 20 year period between 1999 and 2021, women candidates made up only 21% of all candidates who ran for Park Ridge alderperson, and the City of Park Ridge has *never* had a woman serve as Mayor.

CON:

Survey participants did not cite *organized* mentorship as something that would encourage them to run. Mentorship is generally thought of as a one-to-one relationship.

More than ⅓ of participants were unsure or disagreed that they would be more likely to run if they had a mentor.

Resources:

Lawless, J. L. & Fox, R. L. (2013). *Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans' Political Ambition*. Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute. Retrieved from https://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/girls-just-wanna-not-run_policy-report.pdf

Oliver, J. E. (2012). *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ridge, C. L. (2016). *Women and gender in local government*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa]. Iowa Research Online. Retrieved from <https://iro.uiowa.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/Women-and-gender-in-local-government/9983777247502771>

Walker, H. (2019). Why don't more women run cities? *Women's Policy Journal*, 12, 31-33.

7 - Should LWVPR include organized educational efforts in our annual program around opportunities to run for Park Ridge City Council and candidate filing?

PRO:

Survey and interview results from this study indicate that increased community education around the process to run as a candidate for alderperson may increase the amount of candidates who choose to file. Forty-six percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they find the process of running for alderperson daunting.

LWVPR is positioned and connected to provide this type of support to the community. Indeed, in 2018, the LWVPR hosted a panel called “So, you want to be a candidate?” that featured women elected sharing their campaign experience as well as advice for others considering a run. Providing accurate information and guidance about participating as a candidate in local elections is aligned with a central purpose of LWVPR, which is to “encourage the active and informed participation of citizens in government.” Related, the [LWV of Wisconsin](#) offers helpful resources (such as a toolkit) to support citizens considering running for public office.

An organized educational event would also be a way to disseminate accurate information regarding the roles and responsibilities of alderpersons. More than one-third (37%) of survey respondents did not have a clear understanding about those roles and responsibilities. The same percentage said they would be more likely to run if they had a better understanding about the job requirements. Similarly, such an event could present more information about the time commitment and dispel possible misperceptions about that time commitment. When asked what factors would discourage someone for running for alderperson, the time commitment was among the most frequently cited factor.

CON:

The LWVPR may not have bandwidth to support this type of event in the upcoming program. Currently, many of the standard LWV committees in our local league don't have members; it's not clear where the energy or efforts to conduct an event like this would originate.

Resources:

The League of Women Voters Wisconsin. (2022). *Run for Office*. Retrieved from <https://my.lwv.org/wisconsin/resources/run-office>

8 - Should people serving on City of Park Ridge boards or commissions be encouraged to run for alderperson roles? **Violates the LWV DEI Policy**

PRO:

From the survey data, 82.61% perceive that serving on a City of Park Ridge board/commission is a valuable way to consider running for an alderperson position, with 63% of the 57 respondents having current or previous board/commission experience. Service on these boards and commissions thus could create a fruitful pipeline for citizens to run for alderperson.

An interviewee commented that familiarity with the Open Meetings Act and individuals who work for the city are helpful when considering running for an alderperson position. Other interviewees described boards and commissions as feeder systems or pipelines for City Council, and in fact five of the respondents reported serving on a commission or board prior to running for alderperson. Related, 60.29% of respondents believe that board/commission members should be encouraged to run, with a majority (70%) having board/commission experience.

From a different perspective, 52.18% of the survey participants described that they personally would be more likely to run if they had board/commission experience. Survey comments included similar opinions. One individual commented that serving on a board/commission might provide a glimpse about the time commitment required for an alderperson. Related, another person thought that “serving on a commission or board [is one form of] preparation for those considering an aldermanic campaign.” Another pointed out that boards and commissions are a good feeder system, adding that we should encourage more people to apply for these positions but that communication about the availability of positions and what these groups do is lacking.

This data is consistent with results from a survey of city council members and candidates from a wide variety of municipalities in Cook, Lake and DuPage counties Oliver (2012), where nearly half of the respondents reported running for office either because of a sense of civic duty *or* because they first worked in an affiliated community organization such as a zoning board, park board or Parent Teacher Association. As Oliver (2012) further stated, “[A]s a pathway to local politics, this makes sense. After all, people who are willing to serve on a zoning board or as president of their local Little League are the types of people willing to get involved in larger community issues.” (p. 101). All survey participants had some leadership role in the Park Ridge community, but it seems that experience on a city board/commission would be more connected to the role of alderperson.

CON:

If recruitment efforts for alderperson positions focus on those currently serving on boards/commissions, this may “create a pretty insular group,” as stated by one interview participant. Other interview participants used the term “insular” or a “closed system.” Eleven participants (15%) with eight being women expressed disagreement about serving on a commission/board as a way to be introduced to city government. Related, some of the women survey participants disagreed with the fairness of the appointment process for board/commissions positions.

A survey comment reflected that inequities do exist when appointments are offered, “to someone who already is on another board or has been on the board previously instead of giving it to a NEW member. This is what hinders the process and discourages people.”

Concerns about the potential exclusion that could result from the recruitment of existing commission or board members was communicated through a survey comment: “Park Ridge has many unspoken rules, as a quiet, pleasant community of Caucasian folks [with] assumed and positively reinforced gender roles.” Another commenter noted that they felt like they were being excluded by a “closed in system” that they couldn't find a way into.

Another concern arises from the fact that commission members are selected through a process that relies on input from sitting alderpersons. Having commission members disproportionately encouraged to run could result in a limited group of individuals who end up serving as alderpersons, with the current council effectively selecting the future council by encouraging the candidacy of people they've selected in the past to serve on commissions. As one survey participant expressed:

The worst thing we can do is just keep having the same people over and over again who ...kind of just run into the job. It's nice to see new faces and get new ideas and new perspectives on stuff.

Other comments on the survey pointed out differences between the work of a commissioner and an alderperson. One respondent suggested that “the work of an alderman is public-facing and political, and the work of a commission is mostly internal (advising, proposing changes, enforcing legislation). It's not a clear funnel from commission to the city council.” Similarly, an interviewee described that prior experience on a commission or board is not necessary for an alderperson position.

Since boards and commissions are topical by nature, individuals who serve on these are able to focus on a particular issue within city government, whereas an alderperson needs to be informed of all issues affecting the city, according to the [Municipal Research and Services Center \(MRSC\) of Washington](#). MRSC further delineates that boards/commissions have a clear mission/purpose. Another difference in the roles was described by an interview participant: “[I’m] happy to serve and support the community, but not in an elected capacity. Zero interest in that.”

As a member of the Sustainability Commission, this person further explains that they are “not interested in running for office, campaigning, etc.”

Another interview participant explained, “I’m also not naive and thinking that running, especially running [in a] contested [election] is, you know, all rainbows in any way shape or form.”

Sixty-two percent of the participants who agreed that the weekly City Council meetings were a deterrent had prior or current board/commission experience. Meeting regularity for boards/commissions ranges from once per month or every other month. A survey participant described that “meetings is only the tip of the time commitment iceberg for alderpersons. There are events/functions in the community, preparation time for the meetings, and time to be present for their constituents.”

Interview participants estimated that the time commitment for an alderperson ranges from 20-40 hours per month “be[ing] visible within the ward,” “do[ing] all the research” to understand the perspectives of their constituents. An interviewee further described that there is “a lot of participating,” attending local and community events. This expectation of being visible does not seem to exist for those serving on a board/commission. Related, Gogen (2022) reported from an Illinois Association of School Board survey, that 57% of school board members spend 5-15 hours per month in the role, which seems very different from the hours of Park Ridge City Council members. The demographics of school boards are different as well, with 50% identifying as women and 47% identifying as men.

Resources:

Gogen, T. K. (2002). IASB Survey Measures Engagement and Satisfaction. *Illinois School Board Journal*, 90(4), 9-11.

Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) of Washington. (2008). Local Government Citizen Advisory Boards: Examples, options, and model practices for the effective and efficient use of advisory boards by local governments. Retrieved from <https://mrsc.org/getmedia/72061479-9ba8-48b4-ab1f-cfa62cf7d4f1/Local-Government-Citizen-Advisory-Boards-pdf.aspx>

Oliver, J. E. (2012). *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

9 - Should Park Ridge citizens be encouraged to engage in more respectful debate in-person and online?

PRO:

Respectful debate in-person and online fosters an environment that promotes participation in local government. The data from the survey and interviews indicate that a negative [campaign] [social media] environment is negatively affecting future elections by discouraging fellow citizens from choosing to file for candidacy.

When asked a general question about what factors discourage survey respondents from considering a run for alderperson, 41% of responses cited the negative aspects of campaigning, including fear of negative treatment and personal attacks, lack of civility, and political divisiveness.

When asked for comments around the election and campaign process, survey respondents also called attention to “social media trolling” and one respondent commented, “the way some of our elected officials are treated, especially on social media, disgusts me... I would not pursue an aldermanic campaign specifically for this reason.”

An interviewee also shared this same conclusion, “I would be very apprehensive and strongly have to reconsider running again after my experience during my first run for office. I personally experienced a lot of intimidation and character assassination.”

Another interviewee shared, “[During my campaign] I was attacked from people who had never met me....the name calling was just absurd. And so, how do you address that?”

For at least some citizens, a healthier local political environment would likely increase candidacy. Any efforts to develop a better understanding of the impact of negative campaign and social media behavior, and decrease that behavior, would be worthwhile. As one respondent shared, “civility is based on common understandings and of what the rules are—those seem, you know, to be out the window these days.”

CON:

The word “debate” can be defined as an argument with opposing sides. The word “argument” is further defined with the role of persuading. Whether debates are held online or in-person, they can stimulate further thinking about a topic to encourage a more critical thought process. Concerns about running for and then serving as an alderperson were described as “unwanted scrutiny by rivals/painful criticism” in the survey. Although criticism can be “painful,” feedback for elected officials is important for hearing community concerns and being responsive.

Related, criticism from others can lead to self-reflection for those who are the targets of public criticism. Additionally, a substantial proportion of survey participants expressed being undeterred from running based on community input/criticism (40.32%). Expressing opinions is part of a democratic society, so attempts to change the ways other want to debate may only result in citizens feeling squashed from sharing their perspectives. According to Scheufele (2000), discussing politics is a necessary condition for a healthy democracy.

A survey respondent described the need for community members to “listen, talk, compromise, and work collaboratively,” but when individuals speak from their own experience, it’s natural to “criticize and attack” as included in a survey comment. Overall, political debates provide an opportunity for citizens to see and listen to opposing candidates, side-by-side, and in an extended time format that affords an opportunity for community members to gain knowledge.

In community social media groups such as those on Facebook, rules are often delineated when joining the group, and moderators then have the role of reminding the group members of these rules and possibly removing posts. As reported by Kelly (2020) in *The Washington Post*, moderators find their role “messy, hard, and unpredictable” (para. 6). In other words, the role of moderating a social media community group can be challenging.

Resources:

Kelly, H. (2020, August 25). Burnout, splinter factions, and deleted posts: Unpaid online moderators struggle to manage divided communities. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/08/25/volunteer-moderators-2020/>

Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3, 297–

APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics

Seventy-one participants completed most of the survey but did not answer every question, although responses to each question were requested when respondents completed the survey. Data were collected about participants' perceptions about running and executing the role of an alderperson. The gender breakdown of males and females was nearly equal. All wards in Park Ridge (PR) were represented; however, 15% of the respondents could not identify their ward number with 70% of these respondents being female. The breakdown for those who could not identify their ward was the same for those with and without board/commission experience. Over 60% of the respondents shared their age to be 40-59 years old and almost half disclosed that they have lived in PR for 19 or more years. Detailed demographic information can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Participant Demographic Information

Category	N	%	Category	N	%
Gender			Age		
Male	29	43.94%	39 or younger	2	3.13%
Female	31	46.97%	40-59	43	67.19%
Prefer not to say	6	9.09%	60 or older	19	29.69%
Ward			Years in PR		
1st	15	23.08%	Less than 3 years	2	3.03%
2nd	3	4.62%	3-6 years	5	7.58%
3rd	9	13.85%	7-10 years	10	15.15%
4th	5	7.69%	11-14 years	11	16.67%
5th	12	18.46%	15-18 years	8	12.12%
6th	4	6.15%	19 or more years	30	45.45%
7th	7	10.77%			
Unsure	10	15.38%			

Forty-three of the participants (67.19%) are currently or have previously served on a Park Ridge City board/commission. Boards/commissions listed were Farmer’s Market, Animal, O’Hare, Planning & Zoning, Library, Sustainability, and Historic Preservation. Five of the respondents previously ran for an alderperson position, three are current or former alderpersons, three applied for a vacant alderperson position, and fifteen ran for other elected positions in Park Ridge.

The participants held current or previous memberships and leadership roles in a variety of local organizations, with a significant number of respondents involved in Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs), Action Ridge, and Go Green Park Ridge. The affiliated organizations for the participants are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Local Organization Involvement

Organization	Member (N)	Leadership Role (N)	Total (N)
PTO	18	14	32
Action Ridge	16	0	16
Go Green Park Ridge	11	4	15
Chamber of Commerce	9	4	13
School Board (i.e., D64 or D207)	8	N/A	8
Park Ridge Newcomers	3	4	7
Park Board	6	N/A	6
Kiwanis	6	0	6
League of Women Voters (LWV)	2	2	4
American Legion	2	0	2
Rotary Club	1	0	1
Park Ridge Lions Club	1	0	1
Republican Women	1	0	1

Table 6. Top 10 Statements

Rating Scale: Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Unsure=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1

Statement	M	SD
The alderperson job description should be available to the public.	4.73	0.53
The training for alderpersons should be consistent, whether appointed or elected.	4.34	0.78
Serving on a commission/board is a valuable way to consider running for an alderperson position.	3.98	0.83
The time commitment for an alderperson is more than the time commitment for a Park Board Commissioner.	3.87	1.01
The structure of wards is effective for the City of Park Ridge.	3.71	0.96

The time commitment for an alderperson is more than the time commitment for a School Board Member (i.e., D64 and D207).	3.70	1.03
I understand the time commitment involved in the role of alderperson.	3.63	1.30
Alderperson compensation should align with surrounding communities.	3.63	1.12
The process for appointing individuals to commission/boards is fair and equitable.	3.61	0.94
Members of commissions/boards should be encouraged to run for alderperson positions.	3.60	0.81

Alderperson Roles and Responsibilities

Seventy (98.6%) participants believed that the alderperson job description should be publicly available. Forty-five participants (63.38%) had clarity about the role of an alderperson. A higher percentage of women (25.8%) were unsure about the alderperson role compared to 17.2% of the male participants with a higher percentage of women expressing uncertainty (30.3% versus 13.8% for men) that this would encourage them to run. Twenty-six participants (37.68%) shared that they would be more likely to run if the job description was clearer with 16 of these individuals having board/commission experience. A few comments suggested that the alderperson role is straightforward; others describe that the responsibilities are extensive and maybe the expectations are too high.

Alderperson Time Commitment

Forty-three participants (60.56%) expressed that they understood the time commitment involved in the alderperson role. Eight out of the 11 participants who were unsure about the time commitment for an alderperson role were women. Thirty-three respondents (46.47%) agreed or strongly agreed that the time commitment was more than a school board member. Related, 39 participants (54.93%) agreed or strongly agreed that the time commitment was more than a Park Board Commissioner. Over 40% of the respondents were unsure about the time commitment of an alderperson in relation to these other elected local officials.

Forty-three percent of the female participants were unsure if they would run for an alderperson position if the time commitment were less. Eighty-four percent of the individuals who expressed disagreement for running if the time commitment were less were those with board/commission experience.

There were a variety of perspectives about the weekly Park Ridge City Council meeting as a deterrent to running and that a lessened time commitment would encourage more individuals to consider running for an alderperson role. Sixty-two percent of the participants who expressed

agreement about the weekly meetings being a deterrent had prior or current board/commission experience. Several comments highlighted the time commitment involved in the alderperson role, mentioning that “public service” requires “work and dedication” if the job is “taken seriously and done properly.”

A variety of different meetings alderpersons need to attend were mentioned in a few of the comments, but one participant added that “meetings is only the tip of the time commitment iceberg for alderpersons. There are events/functions in the community, preparation time for the meetings, and time to be present for their constituents.” Lastly, another respondent shared that “the process and time commitment association with running/campaigning for alderman is unclear.”

Alderperson Wards Versus At-Large Positions

The Park Ridge City government is made up of seven wards and one mayor. Each alderperson represents their own geographic ward. A third (23) of the respondents expressed uncertainty, and 40 (57.97%) expressed certainty that the ward structure is effective. Four female participants and one male participant expressed that wards were not effective for the City of Park Ridge. Four out of five participants who expressed similar ineffectiveness had board/commission experience. A smaller percentage of residents (44.93%) understood what their alderperson does to represent their ward.

Some cities are structured differently with at-large roles. In that structure, elected officials are not tied to a specific geographic area, rather, they represent the whole city. Eighty-eight percent (16) of the respondents who did not perceive that at-large alderpersons would represent the unique issues of each ward had board/commission experience. Over one-third of the participants (25) were unsure if an at-large structure would be effective in representing the varied areas of Park Ridge.

Further, 29 of the participants (42.03%) were unsure if an at-large structure would encourage more residents to run for alderperson roles; 62% of these participants who were unsure were females. Fourteen out of 16 participants who disagreed that an at-large structure would encourage more individuals to run had board/commission experience.

Thirty-two respondents (46.37%) disagreed that wards and running against a neighbor would be a deterrent with 65.5% of these individuals having board/commission experience. One respondent mentioned that their alderperson is a parent at the same school, and this would prevent this

individual from running. One individual shared that in their experience serving in an at-large capacity, the alderperson was able to be challenged by the “various concerns of the constituents.”

Several comments expressed the benefits of having alderpersons living in all areas of the city conveying that “representation is critical for democracy,” with other comments describing that at-large roles would be “detrimental” in promoting “cliques” and “groupthink.” And increased time commitment for at-large roles was expressed in several comments. Finally, one resident believes that reverting to the previous structure in Park Ridge “with 14 alderpeople, more issues could be resolved”

Aldersperson Compensation

The compensation of a Park Ridge alderperson is \$100/month. Thirty-three of the participants (47.82%) expressed the need for the compensation to change; however, 29 residents (42.03%) perceived that a compensation change would not encourage more people to run with 69% of these respondents having board/commission experience. Several comments suggested that “higher compensation should never be the motivation behind running for an alderperson office in Park Ridge” since the role is about “public service to the community.” One resident described that “spending more money [on alderperson’s salaries] would add costs without benefits.”

The City of Park Ridge conducted a compensation study in 2017, reporting the market average for alderpersons in comparable communities as \$346.88/month. Forty-four of the survey participants (63.77%) expressed that the alderperson compensation should align with surrounding communities. Several comments mentioned how alderpersons are “overworked and underpaid.” All eight survey participants who disagreed about aligning compensation with surrounding areas had board/commission experience.

Park Ridge City Council Boards/Commissions

Many citizens serve their community as members of boards/commissions to be introduced to city government. From the survey data, 57 participants (82.61%), with 36 of them having board/commission experience themselves, perceive that serving on a commission/board is a valuable way to consider running for an alderperson position with 41 respondents (60.29%) believing that board/commission members should be encouraged to run; 70% of these individuals had board/commission experience themselves. Eleven participants with eight being

women expressed disagreement about serving on a commission/board as an introduction to city government.

Thirty-six individuals (52.18%) described that they personally would be more likely to run if they had board/commission experience. One individual commented that serving in this capacity might provide a glimpse into the time commitment required for an alderperson. Related, another person thought that “serving on a commission or board [is one form of] preparation for those considering an aldermanic campaign.” Other comments convey a different perspective suggesting that “the work of an alderman is public-facing and political, and the work of a commission is mostly internal (advising, proposing changes, enforcing legislation). It’s not a clear funnel from commission to the city council.”

To be appointed to a City of Park Ridge board or commission (e.g., Planning & Zoning, Historic Preservation, and Health Commission) individuals apply and interview with the Mayor’s Advisory Board, made up of four alderpersons, to discuss their interests and qualifications. The Mayor reviews the recommendations and then makes appointments to the boards/commissions. Forty-one survey participants (59.42%) perceived that this process is fair and equitable.

Nine individuals disagreed with the fairness of the process; eight of those nine were women. An individual commented that inequities do exist when positions are given, “to someone who already is on another board or has been on the board previously instead of giving it to a NEW member. This is what hinders the process and discourages people.” Another respondent described that “there should be more transparency around how people are appointed to commissions/boards.”

Aldersperson Training

Regarding adequate training for new alderpersons, 56 of the participants (82.35%) expressed a level of uncertainty; 71.7% of these participants who were uncertain had board/commission experience. Sixty of the respondents (88.24%) agreed that the training for alderpersons should be consistent for both appointees and those who are elected. Thirty-one individuals (46.27%) conveyed agreement that they would be more likely to run if adequate training were provided; 84.21% of the participants who disagreed with this had board/commission experience.

One of the commenters described that “good training is always going to be a great investment for leadership roles;” however, a few respondents shared that training might encourage a “groupthink dynamic among elected representatives.”

Election/Campaign Process

An element of encouragement may persuade more individuals to run for alderperson positions, as perceived by 58.21% (39) of the respondents, with almost three-fourths having board/commission experience. Of the 13 individuals who disagreed with this, nine of them were women. Forty-three of the respondents (65.15%) believe that the support of a mentor would increase their likelihood to run for an alderperson role. Eleven individuals were not sure about mentorship; 63.6% of those respondents were men.

One person specified that a mentor should not be a current alderperson. Related, several comments involved the “very difficult (if not nearly impossible) [process] to successfully run against someone [an incumbent] who has been in the position for several years.”

Thirty-one of the participants (46.27%) agreed about the daunting nature of running for an alderperson role with men being two-thirds of the participants expressing uncertainty about this. For the participants who disagreed with the process of running being daunting, 16 out of 21 individuals (76.19%) had board/commission experience.

Thirty-six individuals (49.26%) agreed that the community input/criticism would deter them from running for an alderperson role with women representing two-thirds of these participants. A comment conveyed this message: “the way some of our elected officials are treated, especially on social media, disgusts me.” Fifty-five of the respondents (82.09%) were not concerned about “fitting in” to Park Ridge City Council, with 71.70% of these individuals having board/commission experience.

Seven out of eight participants who expressed concerns about “fitting in” were women.

Factors that Encourage/Discourage Running

The survey data regarding the likelihood that individuals would consider running for a public office is shared in Table 3.

Individuals were more likely to run for City Council in comparison to the Park Board and School Board, but the responses to running for an alderperson position varied more with the larger standard deviation.

Eleven participants responded with 0, that they would never consider running, and nine of these individuals were women.

Table 7. Likelihood of Running

Scale of 0-10, with 0 being "never" and 10 being "very likely"

Elected Position	Median	Mode	Mean	Standard Deviation
Aldersperson	5	0	4.85	11.86
Park Board Commissioner	2	0	3.13	9.08
School Board Member	2	0	3.13	9.73

Contributing to the community and making positive changes were reasons several individuals described that would encourage them to run. Forty-three percent of the comments in this section of the survey mentioned to word "community." Five comments involved the prospect of representing their neighborhood/ward. One individual described, "I love Park Ridge and always want to work to make it the best community possible for our residents and our businesses." One of the comments discouraging individuals to run connects to the "boys club, exclusionary mentality, [which is] intimidating to new, female identifying candidates."

A lack of inclusion was mentioned by another individual, describing that "Park Ridge has many unspoken rules, as a quiet, pleasant community of Caucasian folks [with] assumed and positively reinforced gender roles." One respondent simply said, "If you're in you're in and if not, you know it."

The public was described as "quick to criticize and attack rather than listen, talk, compromise, and work collaboratively." Similarly, "unwanted scrutiny by rivals/painful criticism" were mentioned as concerns. Sixteen of the comments included that the time commitment of both campaigning and carrying out the role of an aldersperson discourage people from running.

Table 8. Factors that Contribute to the Likelihood of Running

		Strongly Agree/Agree		
	I would be more likely to run if...	Total	Male	Female
Mentorship	I had a mentor to support me.	67%	43%	50%
Commission/Board	I served on a commission/board previously.	53%	51%	37%
Time Commitment	the time commitment for the alderperson role was less.	34%	59%	50%
Training	know alderpersons participated in a formal training program.	45%	52%	48%
Job Description	the job description was clear to me.	41%	58%	42%
At-Large Role	the role was at-large.	32%	48%	50%
Compensation	the compensation was increased	18%	58%	42%

APPENDIX B: NOTES AND INFORMATION ON ELECTION DATA

As an initial matter, the Rarely Running Study Committee looked at election data for Park Ridge and Des Plaines during the period from 1999-2019. Des Plaines is a neighboring community with a similar ward structure.

Some differences in the data were notable: In the 58 elections held in Park Ridge from 1999-2019, 41% of them were contested. In the 46 elections held in Des Plaines during that same period, 74% of them were contested. Over that same period, the Study Committee also looked at data on the number of women who ran for office. Over the 20 year period, the total number of women running in elections in Des Plaines and Park Ridge were similar: 20% of the candidates in Park Ridge were women, compared to 25% in Des Plaines.

Over that same period, however, the percentage of races with one or more women running in Des Plaines was 43%, compared to just 27% in Park Ridge.

Election data from other similar communities was also collected. These communities were selected because of comparable population, budget, median home value, median household income and/or percent with bachelor’s degrees or higher. To compare to the data from Park Ridge after the Park Ridge City Council was reduced from 14 to 7 members, election data was limited to elections occurring from 2011 to 2021.

Municipality (Ward Structure)	% of elections contested 2011-2021	% of women candidates 2011-2021
Des Plaines	84	20
Elmhurst	48	29
Geneva	38	29
Palatine	5	0
Park Ridge	40	24
Prospect Heights	47	32
Rolling Meadows	43	19

In reviewing the data, it was clear that some communities had more contested races than Park Ridge, while others had less. Overall, on these data points, Park Ridge fell into the mid-range. The Study Group considered examining what other communities might be doing, or what issues were present in those communities may result in more/less contested elections.

It was decided that, rather than examining what other communities were doing, the Rarely Running Study Committee would look at what was happening within Park Ridge to identify areas that might impact the decision to run, and/or to serve.

The Study Committee decided that Park Ridge’s data showing that almost 60% of its aldermanic races went uncontested over a sustained period of time was something that required study, without reference to the data from other communities.

One area we felt merited additional research involved municipalities that have at-large elected representatives. Similar residential markets with at-large government systems were reviewed to determine if there was any significant difference in number of people running in at-large villages compared to ward systems, such as Park Ridge has.

For this review, seven villages were selected. Arlington Heights, Glenview, and LaGrange were selected because they were identified as comparable by the consultants who did the outreach for the City of Park Ridge Comprehensive Plan, currently in development. Buffalo Grove, Mount Prospect, Niles, and Wheeling were added based on comparable population, budget, median home value, median household income and/or percent with bachelor’s degrees or higher. While we did not find data to support that more candidates overall ran in at-large elections, one data point that popped out in reviewing the election data had to do with the participation by women in races in at-large communities:

Municipality At-Large Structure	% of races women ran in 2001-2021
Arlington Heights	81
Buffalo Grove	67
Glenview	72
LaGrange	58
Mount Prospect	63
Niles	90
Wheeling	81

Over the 20-year period, women participated in 58 of the 79 (73%) at-large elections that took place in these communities. This is much higher than the 33% of Park Ridge races that women participated in during that same time period. Election data was taken from official county election websites for Cook, DuPage, Lake, and Will Counties.