

# Ward System Has Its Benefits

*Guest Column  
By Rob Sanders*

In last week's "Our Sunday Challenge," Larry Nager demanded that each commissioner answer his questions about the "ward system" of government that Covington recently adopted.

I voted against the ward system, not because it was a bad idea, but because I felt the vote was rushed and that the vast majority of Covington did not understand the new process. Nager's misinformed statements about the ward system only confirmed my feelings because if an associate news editor does not understand the new form of government, then it is highly unlikely that the average voter understands it either. So I write this article not because I feel that I owe Nager an explanation for something I voted against, but in an effort to help my fellow citizens of Covington better understand the ward system.

In the ward system, citizens basically vote for four commissioners in separate elections. In the former system, citizens voted for four candidates in a field race. Field races meant that sitting commissioners spent the first year of their term trying to put animosity left over from the last election behind them and the second year of their term campaigning against one another. Separate elections means no competition between sitting commissioners and, thus, more time spent bettering Covington.

## **Wards Will Make it Tougher on Incumbents**

The ward system also means one-on-one competition in the general election. Despite claims that the ward system will "help incumbents," I believe it will actually make elections more difficult. Unlike past elections, incumbents will now be specifically accountable for their voting record and qualifications. In a field race, attacking an incumbent's record or qualifications might have knocked the incumbent out, but it was also likely that the challenger doing the attacking would lose too. If you don't like an incumbent's attitude, voting record, or qualifications, now is your chance, as a voter, to address your issues directly with the incumbent.

If only certain commissioners need to be replaced then there is no need to make all four run for re-election. This means less money spent on elections. Field races also favor those with good name recognition. Incumbents are constantly in the news and have a gigantic advantage in a field race. As the only first-time candidate to beat an incumbent in quite some time, I know first-hand that it costs a lot of money for a challenger to get his or her name ID up enough to win. Ward races actually reduce an incumbent's advantage.

The one drawback in a ward system is two candidates from one ward could both be better than a candidate in another ward, thus meaning Covington might not get the four best people for the job. While I admit this situation is not good, it is a fact of life in every legislative body above municipal government. On the other hand, wards ensure that no one portion of the city has a majority on the commission.

I am leaving the Commission to run for my dream job of commonwealth's attorney for Kenton County. My departure gives the city the unique opportunity to draw up wards without incumbents fighting over boundaries. In the long run, I think wards will serve Covington well. Regardless of which form of elections Covington has, however, there is only one thing that will continue to improve the city and the commission and that is qualified candidates! So I issue "My Sunday Challenge" to those citizens of Covington who think they can improve their city...run for office. Your city needs you!

*Covington Vice Mayor Rob Sanders invites anyone who wishes to discuss the ward system further to email him at [rsanders@covingtonky.gov](mailto:rsanders@covingtonky.gov).*

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