

Historical Perspective on VNC's Unusual Voting  
by Elizabeth Wright

These are my recollections. No guarantees regarding the accuracy of my memory.

When certified, the Grassroots Venice Neighborhood Council Board was made up of 7 executive members, 7 geographically specific community officers, and 7 at-large community officers. Only people who lived, worked, or owned property in the area were considered stakeholders.

Two elections prior to 2005, enough Board positions were won by members of a specific political party that they controlled all actions of the neighborhood council. They had a slate that included candidates for all the executive officers and a sufficient number of Community Officers to dictate the outcome for any motion. No matter what the community wanted, or requested consideration for, it lost if it did not fit into the political party's agenda. It was not that they were using the \$50,000 for personal things, but they spent it exclusively on their ideas of what would benefit the community. Their land use decisions always conformed with their vision of what Venice should be. No other ideas ever won a vote.

During the election prior to 2005 the existing Board tried to combine the election with a meeting to change the bylaws. They did get the most votes, but the election was challenged and the challenge was upheld.

DONE assigned someone to guide Venice in rewriting its bylaws, resulting in the following attributes.

1. Geographically defined offices were eliminated.
2. The Neighborhood Committee was created to ensure that concerns of geographic areas would still be brought up and considered.
3. Instead of voting for all 14 Community Officers, each stakeholder could vote for only one.

This collection of changes was to prevent another takeover. There has not been another takeover.

The Neighborhood Committee worked extremely well. In addition to the day-to-day stuff like helping coordinate cleanups, each year the Neighborhood Committee would solicit project ideas from the community. They evaluated which area would benefit (so they could make sure one area was not getting more from the VNC than others), whether everyone would benefit or just a select group, etc. Recommendations from the Neighborhood Committee, passed by the Board, were instrumental in getting the annual, free, world-class Masters in the Chapel concerts held in the First Lutheran Church of Venice off the ground, landscaping ignored city property, being a sponsor for a huge motorcycle show in Venice, assisting an elementary school's hand bell group get to Europe where they played at the Olympics (or some equally impressive occasion), and on and on.

In addition to making it difficult for slates to take over, the vote-for-one has enabled the regular guy to get elected. If slates of all executive officers and 13 At-Large Community Officers run, the guy without name recognition or a lot of money could not get elected. With vote-for-one there is a chance. And that person is not beholden to vote the way someone else tells him/her to.

I urge the Board to consider the numbers, not just the difficulty they have explaining why stakeholders can vote for only 1 At-Large Community Officer. The explanation is not difficult - yes, it's unusual, but it prevents a takeover.

This is how many votes it took to get elected in past elections for which I easily found data. I did not cherry-pick.

	2007	2010	2016	2019	2021	2023
President	329	*	1784	1045	955	563
At-Large Community Officer - highest vote	66	173	220	195	208	129
At-Large Community Officer - 2 <sup>nd</sup> highest vote	57	112	124	173	138	62
At-Large Community Officer - 7 <sup>th</sup> highest vote	*	*	87	80	83	39
At-Large Community Officer - 13 <sup>th</sup> highest vote	8	28	71	55	58	30

\* The information was not conveniently available.