

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2278

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to local government election practices.

Brief Description: Making laws relating to local government office vacancies more uniform.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Horn, H. Myers, Edmondson and Springer).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Local Government, February 4, 1994, DPS;
Passed House, February 10, 1994, 86-0;
Amended by Senate;
House concurred;
Passed Legislature, March 7, 1994, 91-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives H. Myers, Chair; Springer, Vice Chair; Edmondson, Ranking Minority Member; Reams, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunshee; R. Fisher; Horn; Moak; Rayburn; Van Luven and Zellinsky.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

Background: Over 65 different types of special districts may be created in this state. Separate statutes exist for most of these different special districts. Many special districts are governed by a governing body composed of elected officials, while the members of some governing bodies consist of appointed officials. All special district elected officials are elected at nonpartisan elections.

Seven different types of cities and towns may be created in this state, each governed by separate statutes. Cities and towns are governed by elected councils or commissions. Some cities and towns have mayors with executive authorities who are not part of the council. Other cities or towns have a council member who is nominally referred to as a mayor, but the mayor has no executive authority. The voters of a city

or town are the voters who reside in the city or town. All city and town elected officials are elected at nonpartisan elections.

General election law exists for elections in special districts where property ownership is not a qualification of voting and for elections in cities and towns. However, certain provisions of city, town, or special district laws provide for election matters differing from general election law. It is most common for a city, town, or special district to conform with general election laws instead of the specific laws for the city, town, or special district that conflict with the general election law. However, in some instances, the specific election laws for a city, town, or special district are followed instead of general election law.

Summary of Bill: Many of the specific provisions of law relating to the election procedures for cities, towns, and special districts where the franchise is not limited to property owners, are altered to conform with the practices of general election law and are made uniform.

1. Filling Vacancies.

A common procedure is established to fill vacancies on the governing bodies of cities and towns, as well as the elected governing bodies of special districts where the franchise is not limited to property owners.

The remaining members of the governing body appoint someone to fill the vacancy. If the appointment is not made within 90 days of the vacancy, the authority to make the appointment reverts to the county legislative authority of the county in which all or the largest geographic portion of the local government is located. If the county legislative authority fails to make the appointment within 180 days of the vacancy, the county or remaining members of the local governmental governing body may request the governor to make the appointment.

Where less than two members of the governing body remain in office, the county legislative authority of the county in which all or the largest geographic portion of the government is located appoints either one or two persons to bring the governing body up to two persons.

2. Occurrence of a vacancy.

General provisions of law detailing when a vacancy occurs in an elected office are cited in the specific laws for cities,

towns, and special districts where the franchise is not limited to property owners.

3. Wards or commissioner districts.

The use of wards, council districts, or commissioner districts is standardized for nonpartisan local governmental governing bodies, other than school districts, that are permitted to use wards, council districts, or commissioner districts.

Wards, council districts, or commissioner districts would be used for: (1) Residency purposes where a candidate for the position would have to reside in the ward or district; and (2) nomination purposes where only voters residing in a ward or district vote at a primary election to nominate candidates for the position.

Wards, council districts, or commissioner districts are not to be used at the general election and the voters throughout the entire local government would vote on an at-large basis to elect each member of the governing body at the general election. However, a city may continue using wards to limit voters at general elections who elect council members if these restrictions existed prior to January 1, 1993.

4. Other provisions.

Statutes relating to ferry districts are repealed.

Voters of a public utility district with a population of 500,000 or more may approve a ballot proposition increasing the size of the commission from three to five members. The board of commissioners of a sewer district, or water district, with more than 10,000 customers may adopt a resolution by a simple majority vote, instead of a unanimous vote, increasing the size of the commission from three to five members.

Various changes are made concerning elections in port districts, including the use of commissioner districts in port districts with less than 500,000 population and the size of the port commission in a proposed port district that is less than countywide.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This clarifies election laws and procedures. This standardizes these procedures.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Jim Justin, Association of Washington Cities.